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**HISTORIOGRAPHY IN *LIVES*: PLUTARCH'S USE OF THUCYDIDES IN THE LIVES
OF *PERICLES* AND *NICIAS***

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This Thesis is submitted for a Master of Arts by Research

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Abstract

This dissertation argues that Plutarch's biographical method falls within the realm of historiography, offering Plutarch's handling of Thucydides' *History* as a source for the *Pericles* and *Nicias* as test cases.

The first chapter discusses the relationship between historiography and biography. History was among the influences in biographical literature's development into a genre of its own. The genre of biography had the capacity for critical inquiry into what the individual in focus was truly like. The chapter also explores their similarities in methodology and purpose, and argues that historiography is broad enough to include biographical models of interpretation.

The next chapter establishes Plutarch's philosophical framework, examining what theories would influence his interpretation of the historical record. While taking Plutarch's statements of separation between history and biography seriously, we can still see that his methods of interpretation are not substantially different from historiography, and he displays a rigorous critical inquiry in the *Lives*.

The third and fourth chapters examine Plutarch's engagement with Thucydides for the *Pericles* and *Nicias*. Where Plutarch quotes Thucydides, he preserves the main facts yet uses vocabulary and style of his own. We place particular focus, however, on Plutarch's divergences from Thucydides, and theorize that these differences are due to Plutarch's own historical reasoning about what happened. We argue ways in which Plutarch was making inferences and deductions from the text before him based upon his philosophical paradigms and broader knowledge of the history. Plutarch also makes deductions based upon his theory of character types, especially evident in the *Nicias*. His judgment of the character of every individual is formed by the historical record, and he makes further predictions of what individuals did or felt where the source is silent drawing from his philosophical understanding of character.

Introduction

Greek literary endeavours underwent significant changes when the supremacy of the Mediterranean world swung from the Hellenistic kingdoms to Imperial Rome. Despite the hegemony of Latin-speaking Rome over the Mediterranean region, Greek culture and language continued to flourish. The Romans were content to allow existing structures to stand so long as stability was guaranteed, and they became fascinated with Greek culture. One aspect of Hellenistic culture that found an audience with the Romans was an interest in the lives of great generals, statesmen, kings, and philosophers. With the new political and social situation of one emperor, rather than a senate, ruling Rome, added to Hellenistic awareness of this singular imperial authority controlling their own nations, the stage was set for the composition of new, innovative forms of biography.¹

Biography had roots in the fifth century BCE when Greek historiography was developing.² Histories usually contained some biographic information also, encompassing an entire war, time period, or nation, yet including such collective entities as armies or cities, and individuals as generals or kings.³ The genre of biography did not directly descend from history, however, as poetry, epic, and encomium have information concerning a person's life as well.⁴ Socrates' popularity led to biographic writing from the philosophical schools.⁵ It became a more definite genre of its own in Hellenistic times when the word *bios* came into usage for writing about the 'lives' of individuals.⁶ By the period of Imperial Rome, biography was popular and was being composed in both Latin and Greek.

¹ Marincola 2009:12.

² Momigliano 1993:23-42.

³ Marincola 2009:16-17.

⁴ See Stuart 1928: 9-29, 38-39.

⁵ Momigliano 1993:17.

⁶ Momigliano 1993:12.

Biography is centred upon one person – their character and actions, virtues and vices, achievements and failures. Yet a biography by nature concerns real people who lived and acted in history. Wallace-Hadrill insightfully remarks, ‘History or not history? The problem faces every biographer in varying degree. Biography occupies an ambivalent position on the outskirts of proper historical writing.’⁷ Wallace-Hadrill’s question can be parameterized further: to what extent were biographers doing history, not as a genre, but as a method. Knowledge of the stories and speech of the subject is a prerequisite to writing a biography, and an exploration of historical sources, especially texts, is the way in which biographers gain this kind of material for their work.⁸ Therefore, a key way to engage this question is to examine the use of the textual sources. What is the function of these texts for the author of a *bios*? A biography could contain tragic elements, philosophy, and even fiction.⁹ Do source texts serve a historiographical function, or are they mere fodder for creating entertaining stories or philosophical elaborations? Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives* could be offered as a case-study on the function of historical sources for a biographer in the Imperial period. Though many documents have been lost, a number of historians that Plutarch employed, including Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War* are still extant.

Work by Pelling, Wardman, and others have demonstrated Plutarch’s close affinity with the genre of history in his critical inquiry into the past and apparent attempts to make his account as accurate as possible.¹⁰ There is still some hesitation to call Plutarch’s method historiography,

⁷ Wallace-Hadrill 1983:8.

⁸ This could be said for historians as well. However, Momigliano observes that many ancient historians were actually writing about contemporary events, thus attention to the written word to discover information of times prior to their own was more limited in their case. See Momigliano 1969:130-131.

⁹ Momigliano 1993:56.

¹⁰ Pelling 2011, Wardman 1974, Stadter 1965 and 1992 are some examples.

however.¹¹ Wardman goes far to recognize the historical content of the *Lives*, and the biographical content of many of the Greek histories, yet comments that Greek historians were ‘engaged in one kind of literary activity, while Plutarch is concerned with another.’¹² Plutarch himself famously states he is not writing ‘Histories’ but ‘Lives’ in the preface to *Alexander–Caesar*.¹³ But what did he mean by this? If his works themselves are not ‘Histories,’ can Plutarch’s method of composing *Lives* from his sources be considered a historiographical method?

Historiography is essentially an attempt at reconstructing what happened in the past from research, then communicating it in narrative form. We will argue that Plutarch is one biographer who did employ the same methods as historians, and considered his sources for the *Lives* as historiographical, requiring methodological care to handle sources and determine truth about the past. This dissertation will select the *Life of Pericles* and *Life of Nicias* from Plutarch’s corpus to examine how Plutarch used Thucydides as historiographical source for these works. This will shed light on his methodology and perhaps give insight into the Greek biographical writing practices of the early Imperial period.

Limitations

Plutarch wrote up to ten Greek Lives with some reference to Thucydides,¹⁴ though for our purposes only the *Life of Pericles* and *Life of Nicias* will be examined here. Plutarch shares material from Thucydides’ *History* about the virtuous Themistocles, Cimon, and Aristides, but it

¹¹ Pelling 2011 argues that Plutarch shares significant similarities to ancient historians (162) but exhibits varying degrees of concern for historical background depending on which *Life* he is writing (207) and does not call Plutarch’s method historiography. Pelling 2010: 217-235 marks some similarities between the *Parallel Lives* and ‘global history’ and states ‘Eventually to do biography *is* to do history, as one can only do each of them by viewing through the filter of the other,’ (emphasis his, 230) but recognizes comparing *Lives* to ‘global history’ has severe limitations. Stadter 1992’s edited volume focuses upon Plutarch’s relationship with history, but highlights potential distortions and Bosworth 1992 says ‘few would claim that Plutarch was in any sense writing history.’ (56).

¹² Wardman 1974:1-4.

¹³ *Alex.* 1.1-3.

¹⁴ Counted in Helmbold and O’Neil 1959:71-72.

is not as extensive. Further, Herodotus' *Histories* had more substantial narratives of the same stories, which Thucydides used himself,¹⁵ making it difficult to determine which source was used by Plutarch. Plutarch's *Alcibiades* pulls from Thucydides heavily, though Alcibiades is firmly an example to avoid rather than imitate, which is atypical for the *Lives* and therefore does not make the best representative case. Further, the characterization theory Plutarch uses for *Alcibiades* can just as easily be argued from *Nicias*. Pericles and Nicias are both important characters in Thucydides' work and therefore gave Plutarch abundant material to work with. Plutarch considers them to be men of morally exemplary nature, despite the presence of some character faults. *Crassus* and *Fabius* are the Roman parallels to *Nicias* and *Pericles* and each make up a unified book, thus that the prologue and ending *synkrisis* maintain the unity of the paired *Lives* will be kept in mind.¹⁶

Certain aspects of history lie outside our purview here, such as the actual historical truth of the accounts. Demonstrating the use of historical method is not to say this method was actually successful in finding 'the truth' about the past (see below). The issue at hand is whether the biographers themselves thought these were true events and if they used historical reasoning in their writing. Thus, their historical method will be primarily discussed on their own terms, though comparison to modern historical theory will be referenced, as well as areas where Plutarch's inferences correspond to inferences from modern historians.

Organisation

Chapter 1 will discuss the relationship between historiography and biography to show that theoretically, they can share the same methods and purposes. Genre is framed by audience expectations, and biography developed out of multiple other genres – including history, poetry,

¹⁵ Hornblower 1996:122-137.

¹⁶ See Duff 2011b:213-278.

and encomium. The influence from history means that there could have been an expectation from ancient readers that biographies were similar to histories in some way. We will show this by pulling together the similarities of history and biography in their methods of critical thinking about the past, use of written evidence, didactic utility, and interest in important characters. We will also see that a delineating factor between history and biography is the scope of the narrative rather than methods of composition. From here, we will move to what it means to say that a biographer uses historiographical method and argue that by both ancient and modern understandings, biography can have this function. In theory, the biographical model could become historiography.

Having established the theoretical possibilities of a shared methodology, we will argue in Chapter 2 that in Plutarch's case the methods and purposes of history and biography actually do correspond. History is ideological, and constructing Plutarch's intellectual framework will allow us to articulate the potential influences for his interpretations of the historical record. There will also be a study of his statements on history and the relationship between history and biography. Our findings here will suggest that Plutarch was careful in his methodology and that his philosophy would inevitably be the major factor in his interpretations of the past. Areas of source usage that appear inconsistent with historiographical standards at first glance may actually be explained by historical reasoning stemming from Plutarch's philosophy.

Chapters 3 and 4 will examine Plutarch's usage of Thucydides' *History* to test our assertion of Plutarch's methods being historiographical. The discussion will begin with the function of the *History* in constructing narratives about Plutarch's subjects. Principles of historiography will be applied to specific situations of parallel between Plutarch and Thucydides to determine whether his practice is consistent with historiography. It will highlight where

Plutarch preserved Thucydides' facts, even if they were presented according to Plutarch's own literary style. Building upon the work of Pelling and Stadter, we will examine differences with Thucydides to find whether they can be explained by a historiographical method. For *Nicias*, we will add to our findings that Plutarch's paradigms of character interpreted Thucydides' historical narrative. The biographical theory of character turns into a type of historiography itself, a way of discovering more about the past.

All English translations of texts are from Loeb editions unless otherwise indicated. Greek words will be transliterated when discussed as a concept, but replicated in Greek alphabet when discussing the texts directly or where the lexical form of the word is important.

CHAPTER 1: Biography as Historiography, Historiography as Biography

This chapter seeks to demonstrate two main ideas: first, that biography has many of the same characteristics of historiography; second, that biography is a separate genre from history, yet lends itself to historical method and use of documents. To demonstrate this, there must be an articulation of the ancient concept of genre and how modern generic theory can relate to it, as well as a description of both the development of biography and the methods and purposes of Greek historiography. We will also compare the aims and scope of biographies and histories, and consider analogies with modern historical theory. The analysis will reveal that although biography and history are separate genres, Plutarch could have had historiographical methodology for interpreting his sources. Biography could have a concern for what ‘really happened’ regarding the individual in focus, even if it is not history on a literary level. Just as the ‘biographic’ appears in history, the ‘historiographic’ appears in biography.

Navigating Genre in Ancient Literature

The literary environment of Greek and Roman writers included a strong sense of generic rules. Genre involves ‘organising things into recognisable classes’¹⁷ and influential thinking about such division occurred in the realm of philosophy in the fourth century BCE. In the *Republic*, Plato does not delineate genres, but inevitably makes divisions of poetry and music in the process of deciding what kind of arts should be allowed into their ideal city. He divides them into three simple types: pure narration, imitative narrative, and a mixture of the two.¹⁸ Aristotle expands on this in the *Poetics*, and adds a prescriptive element, that every category of literature should be appropriate to itself – epics should not be organised like histories, literary devices for

¹⁷ Frow 2007:51.

¹⁸ *Republic*, 392d.

heroic verse are not fitting for iambic verse, and so on.¹⁹ In discussing the relationship between theory and practice among Greco-Roman poets, Farrell observes that the ancient literary critics did not share or address the ambiguity that moderns have in discussing genre; rather, the categories were fairly straightforward to them.²⁰ In the first century BCE, Horace used ‘law of genre’ (*operis lex*) as a technical phrase meaning there are rules which the poet should not break, though how closely the ancients followed their own rules is another problematic subject, as poets, even Horace himself, appear to transgress the rules in their poetry.²¹

The problem of generic rule-breaking in the praxis of literature has been a major contributive factor to the replacement of the classical, prescriptive model with more descriptive notions in modern genre theory.²² Frye, for instance, considered the old idea of rules for literature as a failure, and attempted to provide a taxonomy of literature.²³ Frow argues genre to produce organized conceptions of reality which affect how we see the world, yet he denies that texts ‘“belong” to genres but are, rather, uses of them; they refer not to “a” genre but to a field or economy of genres, and their complexity derives from the complexity of that relation.’²⁴ Classifications alone are not adequate, however. Hirsch has contended that genre is a convention, a norm, a framing of texts into categories in order to provide a set of general expectations so that the audience can comprehend it, yet leaves expansive room for a variety of things to be said.²⁵

¹⁹ *Poetics*, 1459a.

²⁰ Farrell 2003:386.

²¹ Farrell 2003: 393-394. This is why questioning the existence of abstract categories of genre in the ancient world to argue that writers imitated other writers, as Rosenmeyer 1985:74-84 argues, seems misguided. Abstract categories obviously existed, and would be on the mind of the educated writer, especially for such a philosopher as Plutarch. See Marincola 1999.

²² Burridge 2004:31.

²³ Frye 1957:3-29.

²⁴ Frow 2007:2.

²⁵ Hirsch 1967:68-126.

The perception of the audience has grounded our understanding of genre today, even across ideological lines.²⁶

The idea of audience expectation as inherent to each generic category has parallels in ancient Greek thought as well. This is implicit in Aristotle's *Poetics*, where any category of literature can give pleasure to the reader, but it must follow the rules of that category to do so.²⁷ These rules still allow for progress within the genre: Aristotle comments that people have high standards for contemporary poets, since they are expected to surpass the greatness of past poets.²⁸ The small communities in earlier periods of Greek history allowed texts to meet the expectations of the audience yet contained a 'dynamic element' to permit competition with predecessors.²⁹ However, the spread and preservation of prose works after the fifth century BCE lead to the transcendence of the localised *Sitz im Leben*; as texts spread outside of the particular communal context, the community itself could no longer determine the reader's comprehension of the author's work, because readers consumed literature from different geographical locations and time periods.³⁰ Inherent characteristics, boundary markers within the text itself, were required to establish what kind of text one was reading, which led to the creation of generic rules.³¹

The ancients' strong sense of generic rules does not mean that new types of literature were forbidden or that writing was static. The dialogues of Plato or the *Cyropaedia*, *Anabasis*, and *Memorabilia* of Xenophon in the fourth century BCE were new, experimental forms of expression that became influential for other genres afterward. While Roman poets were careful to state that the rules of genre must be followed, their innovations in poetry went beyond their

²⁶ Kent 1986:147. See also Dubrow 1982:31 and Burridge 2004:32.

²⁷ *Poetics*, 1453a, 1462a-1462b.

²⁸ *Poetics*, 1456a.

²⁹ Hose 2005:681.

³⁰ Hose 2005:683.

³¹ Hose 2005:683.

own rules, implying that they were more concerned about avoiding vagueness than maintaining purity of the category; their ‘generic self-awareness’ was strict but in practice more flexible.³² This was the case with historiography as well.³³ Marincola notes that when any author set to write, each one had to compete with other works and justify his own while at the same time imitating the good aspects of them, not ‘slavish copying of the model but the infusion of a new spirit into a traditional treatment.’³⁴ This sheds light on how to approach two pieces of literature supposedly in different categories yet sharing significant similarities. It is possible to articulate a clear genre yet allow space for expansion and innovation, which may share content with other genres. In fact, cross-over of genres and creation of new types of texts were characteristic of Hellenistic and Roman literary activity.³⁵ In the case of biography, it was a new genre formed from and alongside pieces of various other genres, as will be outlined below. At this point, we see that generic conventions that leave both freedom for the writer and parameters for the reader’s expectations are sufficient to satisfy both ancient and modern approaches.

Having established that genre involves texts dynamically created under a set of generic norms or expectations, how does history and biography relate to genre specifically? From what has been said above, we can give three deductions. First, the space a genre gives for expansion implies that biography had the capacity to incorporate aspects of historiography. Second, it is not necessary to merge histories and biographies into one genre, even if they incorporate the same kinds of methodology. Third, genre determined by expectation tells us something about the audience. If any work is a painstaking reconstruction of what happened in the past, then this could be something the audience desires. If the audience is interested not only in an intriguing

³² Farrell 2003: 396.

³³ See Marincola 1997:237-257.

³⁴ Marincola 1999:299.

³⁵ See Kroll 1924:202-224.

narrative but also in the veracity of the events, they would listen or read with a critical mind and anticipate an attempt at an accurate reconstruction. Texts are created by authors in the hope that there will be an audience, therefore popularity and general expectations for what makes a good piece are significant in the context of the Mediterranean world.

The development of bios

Generic expectation helps explain the biographic material found across many kinds of literature prior to the fifth century BCE. Momigliano takes the predecessors of biography to be anything to do with ‘an individual in isolation’ from broader events, such as letters, speeches, sayings collections, or anecdotes.³⁶ Greeks had been interested in ‘heroes of the past’ throughout their recorded history, as is evident from their poems.³⁷ The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* make much of the individual feelings and deeds of Achilles, Nestor, Odysseus, and others. The poets themselves received biographical interest through anecdotes told about Homer and Hesiod, in addition to other leaders from the distant past such as ‘the Seven Sages’ and legendary lawgivers, who became the subjects of incidental narrative traditions.³⁸ This curiosity about important personalities of the past led to the construction of biographic stories, but whether they were true, false, or partially true is difficult to determine. Some of them seemed legitimate enough to historians for inclusion in histories, such as the episode of Solon and Croesus in Herodotus.³⁹

The biographic found its way into prose when it became a common medium of writing in the fifth century. Herodotus included stories of individuals like Cyrus, Xerxes, and Themistocles.⁴⁰ There were stories about the birth, upbringing, and actions of key figures who Herodotus thought relevant to the broader narrative. Momigliano observes that the biographical

³⁶ Momigliano 1993:23.

³⁷ Momigliano 1993:24-25.

³⁸ Hägg 2012:10-11.

³⁹ *Histories* 1.29-33.

⁴⁰ See *Histories*, Book 7.

material contained in Herodotus is mainly from eastern kings or Greeks living in Asia: ‘evidently he found more biographical material in Asia Minor than in metropolitan Greece.’⁴¹ This may be a precursor to Nicolaus of Damascus, Philo, and other eastern biography writers to come, but it appears that there was a running curiosity about the leaders in the Persian Empire who had caused such change in Greece.⁴² In Thucydides’ *History*, individual leaders are discussed in the narrative, although they are present in the context of the greater story, and there is usually little personal information given. However, there are a number of comments on the abilities of a leader or general, and sometimes comments about their character.⁴³ Westlake argues that Thucydides was not as interested in the ability and character of the individuals until the later stages of his historical composition, where his opinions on key players become more pronounced.⁴⁴ Xenophon also includes considerable information about individuals. The *Anabasis* includes an extended section profiling the lives and character of the Greek generals captured and executed by Tissaphernes, including themes of their lives, such as Clearchus’ love of war or Menon’s greedy ambition.⁴⁵ The *Hellenica* has many outstanding individuals who make up an important part of the flow of the narrative, such as attributing Agesilaos’ hatred of the Thebans as a cause for his hurry to invade before the Theban ambassadors returned, or the dynamic rivalry between Theramenes and Kritias in the rule of the Thirty in Athens.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Momigliano 1993:34.

⁴² At least, this is what such inclusions imply, in light of our above findings about reader expectations.

⁴³ Westlake 1968:7.

⁴⁴ Westlake 1968:15. Momigliano 1993:34 believed that Thucydides had an interest in biography, more so in the previous generations than in his contemporaries in Athens, though Westlake’s argument on Thucydides’ later interest in Nicias and Alcibiades may dispute this. However, a read of Thucydides makes it clear that individuals are part of a wider story and mixed with collective entities, as our comparison with Plutarch in the next chapters will show.

⁴⁵ *Anabasis* 2.6.1-30.

⁴⁶ *Hellenica* 5.1.32 and 2.3.1-56.

One predecessor to the scope and prose of biography was the encomium, a category of expression that praises a person for their good qualities.⁴⁷ Encomium, like biography, was of lesser length than larger works, such as epics or histories. Isocrates gives one of the earliest such works with *Evagoras*, which became a model for future encomium in its careful exclusion of anything negative about the subject, as the ignoble death of Evagoras is absent from this piece.⁴⁸ Isocrates is clear on the experimental challenge he is undertaking, commenting that his is a prose work without the benefits of poetic devices, hence ‘we must not hesitate to attempt prose speeches to see if good men may be praised by such speeches just as well as by those who celebrate them in songs and meter.’⁴⁹ Encomium is similar to biography in its individual focus, concern for moral behaviour, scope, and even the possibility of straining the truth to make the character appear greater. Burridge places biography on a continuum between history and encomium; therefore, a biography may share characteristics of either one to varying degrees.⁵⁰

The development of philosophy also proved to be a contributor to the development of biography. Socrates was remarkably influential, and his dramatic death in Athens galvanised some of his supporters to defend and venerate him in writing.⁵¹ Plato and Xenophon did not give full life stories of Socrates, but preferred anecdotes or dialogue forms, which may attempt to get across the spirit of Socrates more than precise re-enactments of what was actually said. This form of writing was popular enough for Xenophon to write the *Cyropaedia*, with its fictive accounts of the life of Cyrus, and for Plato to write dialogues presenting progressively less of the historical Socrates.⁵² Apparently, this lack of historical accuracy regarding speech was not a

⁴⁷ Burridge 2004:65-66.

⁴⁸ Mirhady and Too 2000:139-140.

⁴⁹ *Evagoras* 9.11, Mirhady and Too trans.

⁵⁰ Burridge 2004:62.

⁵¹ See Danzig 2010:5-13.

⁵² This is the traditional understanding of Plato and Socrates, but it has been questioned. See Rowe 2006:159-170.

problem for them or their readership.⁵³ It is the stories of the virtuous that were important, whether the quotations in the texts were verbatim or not. Nevertheless, there are episodes of the dialogues where a guarantee is given of the dialogue's accuracy, based on memory of conversations, as in Socrates recalling a particularly engaging dialogue and relating it to friends, or others writing the dialogue down and checking with witnesses.⁵⁴ In Plato's *Symposium*, for example, Apollodorus is asked to tell the story of the banquet with Socrates, which he learned by heart and questioned Socrates on details to confirm their veracity.⁵⁵ At the least, this shows that recollection of what actually happened is expected, even if fictionally portrayed. Claims for authentication are something the reader has come to anticipate, as various literary pieces including biographic material contain such statements.

Stories concerning individuals leading up to the Hellenistic period are generally about praise-worthy persons: a great political leader, literary genius, or wise philosopher. It should be remembered that the driver of biographic material was an interest in these personalities. Certain individuals were very influential, such as Socrates for philosophy or Homer for the canon of epic poetry. Additionally, Alexander the Great's initiation of Hellenic power over the Persians who overshadowed them for so long was a shock to Greek consciousness and generated interest in Alexander himself. By the fourth century BCE, Momigliano observes, 'The evidence for interest in biography and autobiography becomes abundant and permeates all aspects of literature.'⁵⁶ There was a general fourth-century trend to shift focus from the *polis* to individuals, one of the reasons for the development of biography.⁵⁷ Marincola exemplifies this by contrasting Thucydides, who makes Athens and Sparta 'characters' in the narrative, and Theopompus, who

⁵³ Momigliano 1993:110.

⁵⁴ *Euthydemus* 272 and *Theaetetus* 143, respectively.

⁵⁵ *Symposium*, 173-174A.

⁵⁶ Momigliano 1993:43.

⁵⁷ Brown 1973:110.

progressed in his literary endeavours from the history of Greece to a history of Philip, a move from collective to individual locus in his historical writing.⁵⁸ It is also important to note that while biographic material was found in non-historical literature, it did make a definite appearance in histories. A number of historians, including Callisthenes, Aristobulus, and Clitarchus, wrote ‘Alexander’ histories in which Alexander is the focal point, though not excluding aspects of the broader context, such as the material on India from Onesicritus.⁵⁹ The fascination with Alexander – his character, deeds, and words – could be seen as a distraction from the wider picture and disrupt the narrative flow, becoming a potential problem in literary composition and structure. This tension between the broader narrative of events and the narrative of a specific individual like Alexander could be seen as an impetus for the initiation of its own genre, the *bios*.

The term *bios* and the genre it represented arose in the Hellenistic age. *Bios* approximately means ‘a way of life,’ and as a genre was intended to relate what kind of men they were and establish an existential connection between them and the reader.⁶⁰ Although Aristotle never wrote a biography to our knowledge, the peripatetic philosophers were influential.⁶¹ They made two major methodological contributions: the respect for the facts derived from inquiry and research, and the systemization of ethics from a framework of nature, habits, and character.⁶² A variety of philosophers, sophists, lawgivers, statesmen, and even playwrights were subjects of peripatetic biographers like Aristoxenus, Hermippus, and Satyrus, though they are no longer extant.⁶³ There is a gap in extant texts from around 200 BCE to the first century BCE when we know of Latin writers, such as Cornelius Nepos and Varro, and Greek biography from Nicolaus

⁵⁸ Marincola 1997:23.

⁵⁹ Brown 1973:124-132.

⁶⁰ Russell 1972:102.

⁶¹ Momigliano 1993:68.

⁶² Russell 1972:105. Peripatetic influence on biography will be discussed further in chapter 2.

⁶³ Momigliano 1993:74-80.

of Damascus.⁶⁴ Polybius wrote at least one biography about the Greek statesman Philopoemen, and one wonders if he wrote others.⁶⁵ Philo of Alexandria wrote a *bios* of Moses in Greek around the beginning of the first century CE. There was a departure from encomium in that there could be a sharing of the vices or failures of the man as well. Only fragments of the Hellenistic Lives remain, so it is difficult to get a sense of the entirety of the works or their structure.⁶⁶ A century ago, Leo theorized that the *bios* genre formed out of two schools, the ‘Peripatetic’ which was meant for a popular audience, and the ‘Alexandrian’ which was more intellectual and didactic.⁶⁷ This strict division is difficult to sustain now, as it has become evident that these works were very diverse. They are so varied that Edwards questions whether to even call biography a genre at all, though going to this length is unnecessary.⁶⁸ Hägg writes that ‘the biographical genre that gradually came into being had a core but no sharp outlines,’ which makes good sense of the diversity of texts that share the common thread of being ‘lives’ of individuals.⁶⁹

This shows us two things. First, the proliferation of biographies indicates the popularity of the genre and an interest in a wide variety of notable individuals, whether they were politicians or sages. Production of biography was driven by a popular interest. Second, due to the broadness in the characteristics of biography, expectations may be broad as well; there was room for flexibility, and the reader may not be surprised to see vast differences in style. This freedom of the author to use any number of compositional strategies, the interest in ethics, and

⁶⁴ Swain 1997:22.

⁶⁵ *Histories* 10.21.5.

⁶⁶ Momigliano 1993:8-9.

⁶⁷ Summary in Hägg 2012:67.

⁶⁸ Edwards 1997:228-234. Edwards says this, however, while looking at late antiquity, a period when biographic material was found in more diverse kinds of literature than the early imperial period. The appearance in the first century of what Greeks themselves called *bioi* and the loose similarity of extant manuscripts of Plutarch, Suetonius, the gospels, and others make the argument that this generic category did not exist unconvincing. See Pelling 1999:329 n. 14 for further response.

⁶⁹ Hägg 2012:68.

the concern for facts about actual figures who acted in the past all contribute to the method of the biographer.

Greek historiographical method

Before answering whether the variable nature of biography incorporates historical method, it would be expedient to survey the subject. Opinions on how to write history varied widely, and on any particular author's method there are many facets.⁷⁰ Therefore, a few strategic examples will suffice from Herodotus, Thucydides, and Polybius with a twofold focus: their level of critical method and their usage of source documents. Alongside these two areas we will also compare the historian's perspective to that of Plutarch's *Lives* and other biographies where appropriate.

The earliest Greek methodological statements on history are those of Herodotus and Thucydides. Except for the statements strewn throughout his work about being told information, Herodotus does not explicitly state his methodology.⁷¹ He claimed his work depended on *historia*, an inquiry or investigation, and required a wide variety of activities to acquire sources.⁷² Waters believes Herodotus grouped his source methods into a sort of hierarchy: autopsy, or 'personal visual investigation'; 'knowledge' from mostly oral, but some documentary, sources; and 'tales' that are commonly told about various things by individuals or within society.⁷³ The use of documents is limited, which may be assigned to the fact that prose literature was still in its early stages and there was not much historical text material to build from.⁷⁴ When he does bring

⁷⁰ Pitcher 2009:180.

⁷¹ Lateiner 1989:59.

⁷² It goes beyond our purposes here to enter the debate concerning Herodotus' reliability. See Fehling 1989 and negative arguments on his sources, and the rejoinder of Pritchett 1993 for positive arguments. It is enough to point out that scholars believe Herodotus did indeed do at least some kind of research as he claimed.

⁷³ Waters 1985:25.

⁷⁴ See Goldhill 2002 for the development of Greek prose.

up written sources it is involved with criticism, as he does with the only other named prose writer, Hecataeus.⁷⁵

Hecataeus not only provided Herodotus with written documentation, but also served as a foil for his own historical reasoning. Lateiner argues that Herodotus referred to Hecataeus much more than he acknowledges, especially for geographical information, and the speculative theorizing of Hecataeus allowed Herodotus ‘the advantage of having ideas and explanations to object to.’⁷⁶ Evidently Herodotus makes reference to king-lists, as in his section on Sparta, ending with a passing reference to other records that he will not duplicate.⁷⁷ Poets make rare appearances in the *Histories*, more for rhetorical opposition than historical information.⁷⁸ Herodotus did not restrict himself to Greek sources, however. Persian and Egyptian sources were at hand as well, and while it is debated how much of it was written, documentary sources are very likely in several cases.⁷⁹ The polemic of Herodotus indicates he was exposed to a variety of sources, whether written or oral, which gave him both information and room for disagreement.

Thucydides became one of the most important models for ancient historians. In his opening sentence, Thucydides does not use *historia*, but *sungraphein* to describe his work, giving ‘a more technical feel’ to the project.⁸⁰ Later in the first book he states the method and attitude towards his investigation, as well as sources.⁸¹ He starts his methodological statement with an admission of a weakness – that he himself and his informants do not always remember the speeches accurately – but then proceeds to his strengths. He names himself as a witness to many of the events, and indicates there are many other eyewitnesses whom he has taken

⁷⁵ Lateiner 1989:92-93.

⁷⁶ Lateiner 1989:94-95.

⁷⁷ *Histories* 6.53-6.55.

⁷⁸ Lateiner 1989: 99-100.

⁷⁹ Lateiner 1989:101-102.

⁸⁰ Shanske 2007:19.

⁸¹ *History* 1.1 and 1.22.

information from. Thucydides represents a critical approach to his subject, stating his cross-checking of more than one source concerning the same event and making decisions afterward. Unlike Herodotus, who pulled up dubious or conflicting reports in his history and let the reader decide (or simply be entertained), Thucydides made choices of what to include beforehand, and gives a continuous narrative without many detours. Shanske observes that passages in the *History* are characterised by density, consistency, ubiquity, open-endedness, familiarity, and significance.⁸² These qualities have been much admired, and Thucydides' influence on Greek historiography cannot be overestimated. It is likely that even through the Hellenistic period his difficult prose was read somewhat widely.⁸³ At the start of the Imperial Roman period he was popular, and even into the second century CE Lucian's essays and satires on history place Thucydides as the quintessential historian.⁸⁴ Though documents were not the core type of evidence on which his histories depended, Thucydides did appropriate written diplomatic documents.⁸⁵ He also may have used written sources for the more distant past or the events leading up to the Peloponnesian War in Book 1, possibly Herodotus himself.⁸⁶

Polybius deserves special attention, as his *tour de force* freely gives his thoughts on the writing of history and was composed in the same era as the *bios* genre's initiation. Marincola comments that 'no other ancient historian, not even Thucydides, gave so much thought to the epistemological difficulties inherent in writing up a historical narrative.'⁸⁷ In his twelfth book, Polybius talks of 'seeing and hearing' as the ways in which the learning required for writing history is accomplished, but the seeing, the personal autopsy, is considered superior.⁸⁸ This is

⁸² Shanske 2007:15-18.

⁸³ See Hornblower 1995:47-68.

⁸⁴ Greenwood 2006:111-129.

⁸⁵ Momigliano 1969:135.

⁸⁶ See Foster and Lateiner 2012 for further reference.

⁸⁷ Marincola 1997:74.

⁸⁸ *Histories* 12.27.1.

obviously not always possible, thus interviewing eyewitnesses is also important, and he criticizes Timaeus for only performing the easy work of sitting in one place using libraries.⁸⁹ Levene has pointed out, however, that Polybius does not trounce the use of written documents in general, but rather the sole use of written material and nothing else.⁹⁰ In his criticisms of Timaeus he even references the written work of Aristotle to support the results of his conversations with the Locrians.⁹¹ Later on, Polybius distils historical method into three areas deserving analysis, and specific attention to Plutarch is appropriate at this point:

In the same fashion systematic history too consists of three parts, the first being the industrious study of memoirs and other documents and a comparison of their contents, the second the survey of cities, places, rivers, lakes, and in general all the peculiar features of land and sea and the distances of one place from another, and the third being the review of political events.⁹²

The review of political events is something that biographies can accomplish, but only insofar as it relates to the person they are writing about. Political events such as how Pericles came to full authority in Athens are intrinsic to the work Plutarch was trying to accomplish, as well as other larger events such as the start of the war with Sparta, though political events are only as interesting when they relate in some way to the character. Polybius would expect that knowledge of political events would relate to political experience, which Plutarch had, though on a smaller, localised scale.⁹³ Other authors of biographies, such as Nicolaus of Damascus and Suetonius, also held political offices and could draw from these experiences in their writing.

The second idea, familiarity with geography, can also be found in biographies, though once again, it is limited to what is relevant to the subject. Plutarch talks about geography occasionally where it relates in some way to the figure he is writing about, such as brief

⁸⁹ *Histories* 12.27.2-6.

⁹⁰ Levene 2009: 627-629.

⁹¹ *Histories* 12.7-8.

⁹² *Histories* 12.25E.

⁹³ See Chapter 2.

descriptions of the roughness of the area around Syracuse to show how skilled Nicias was in building fortifications so quickly.⁹⁴ Plutarch had also travelled to Rome, Athens, and parts of the Mediterranean that are relevant to his lives, which would go towards the experience of which Polybius speaks. In a biography, however, the principle of relevance to the individual's life is the determining factor of how much geography is included, and the same holds for history. The kind of geography Polybius requires is that which is relevant to the stories being told. Polybius visited the Alps in person to discover more about Hannibal's crossing.⁹⁵ He would likely not spend time on insignificant villages or small islands which had nothing to do with the momentous events he was investigating.

The first idea in Polybius' list is the closest correlation to what biographers did – study documents and memoirs to obtain material for the man. Plutarch's *Lives* were based on his very extensive reading, and he frequently names his sources and compares differing accounts within his narratives. We also saw above that Peripatetic biographers in the Hellenistic period prior also dug up documents to write about individuals of the past. The Synoptic gospel writers used written text for writing about the life of Jesus as well, and the Gospel of Matthew is especially dependent on a written copy of Mark's Gospel.⁹⁶

However, later on in this book, Polybius appears to distance history from this key connector between history and biography. He states that studying old documents and spending time in libraries does not automatically make one qualified to write history, and he emphasizes the life experience required.⁹⁷ This sounds odd to modern historians, who hold the study of documents in first place for obtaining answers to questions about the past, and there is often a

⁹⁴ *Nic.*17.

⁹⁵ *Histories* 3.48.

⁹⁶ There is debate as to how much of the sources of the gospels were oral traditions and how much was written. Dunn 2013 argues for oral priority, but Watson 2013:217-285 argues that the gospel writers used 'sayings gospels' similar to the Gospel of Thomas, as textual sources.

⁹⁷ *Histories* 25E-F.

dichotomy between those who act and others who write literature about those who act.⁹⁸ But three contextual issues must be remembered, which make this distance not so great as it may appear. First, Polybius has a rhetorical purpose – to assert the superiority of his *Histories* over those of his competitors. Timaeus was a very important historian of the period before Polybius and continued to be cited by other writers even after the harsh criticism from Polybius.⁹⁹ To prove the value of his masterpiece, Polybius must put special stress on the points in which his work is superior to others. Second, Polybius is critiquing other *historians*, who are indeed historians and had their own ideas as to which methods are appropriate for historiography, yet their works do not survive for us to give a fairer appraisal. Polybius could not overturn the fact that they were historians or that documentary study was a common method of writing history, but argued that they were doing their job poorly if they did not have wider experience and or undertake proper methodological care. Lastly, and most importantly, Polybius is criticising other historians not for the study of documents in itself, but the study of documents in isolation from the broader world. Documents were still crucial to the historiographical process. Polybius was heavily absorbed in the study of documents to write his first two books, and quotes from other historians such as Fabius Pictor, Antisthenes, and Ephorus.¹⁰⁰ He also obtained letters and memoirs, probably searched official archives, and had opportunity to access records from Rome, Rhodes, and the Achaean League.¹⁰¹

The *Histories* of Polybius are universal and contain the broadest possible scope for a single work, making geography and experience inherently crucial to his purpose in a way that is not the case for a more restricted biography. Polybius' three aspects of historiography are all

⁹⁸ Collingwood 1946:10.

⁹⁹ See Meister 2006.

¹⁰⁰ Walbank 1957:27-30.

¹⁰¹ Walbank 1957:30-32.

present to varying degrees in composing biography, but written documents play a central role for both genres. At this point there seem to be two major differences between the views of Polybius and the practice of biography: scope and current autopsy of the events. We will discuss the defining difference regarding scope below. First, however, the use documents as sources inevitably brings up the question of contemporary history versus history of the distant past. We must analyse this dichotomy and its relationship to biography.

Contemporary history, the inquiry into the events of one's own period, is a significant incongruence to biography, whose authors usually collect texts about individuals from prior eras. There has long been a distinction between history and antiquarianism that harkens back to Greco-Roman thought.¹⁰² Poring over smaller details of the past was grouped into the practice of antiquarianism, while the writing about causes and actions of people not far removed from the writer's own time is history.¹⁰³ Polybius was primarily writing about his own times, as did other major Greek historians such as Thucydides and Xenophon.¹⁰⁴ Thucydides lived through the war of which he wrote, and even dismissed the possibility of knowing very much about the further or nearer past.¹⁰⁵ Notable Roman and Jewish historians such as Josephus and Tacitus also focused on contemporary events. Does this sever a key methodological link between history and biography?

We argue that it does not, for several reasons. The decision to write contemporary history need not have so much to do with methodology as with pragmatism. Witnessing contemporary events was often an impetus for someone to write a history of those events, for the simple reason that they experienced them and knew them well. They were confronted with events that became

¹⁰² Cornell 1995:2.

¹⁰³ Momigliano 1969:4.

¹⁰⁴ Momigliano 1969:131.

¹⁰⁵ *History* 1.1.

highly significant, and wrote because they themselves were a part of the story. Thucydides believed the Peloponnesian War of which he played a part was the greatest war yet to be fought, and desired to keep a record for posterity.¹⁰⁶ That Xenophon was among the Greek mercenaries who marched their way from Asia to Greece must have influenced his decision to write the *Anabasis*. Polybius saw the astounding rise of Rome and fall of Hellenistic power for himself and sought to research and write his histories on that basis.¹⁰⁷ Josephus participated in the Jewish war, witnessed the fall of his homeland, and shifted his allegiance, an intersection of factors that brought him to write his own account.¹⁰⁸

Moreover, the ancients faced the problem of all historians – finding sources for the past. The reason Thucydides disparaged writing about the distant past was the lack of evidence available.¹⁰⁹ History-writing today confronts the same challenge; for example, there is drastically more data available for doing 20th century history than Greco-Roman history. The further the subject is from the present, the more evidence is usually lost. This is why cautious historians like Thucydides and Polybius kept to events close to their own period, and events of direct concern to themselves, rather than distant peoples with which the more adventurous Herodotus occupied his history.¹¹⁰

Another practical reason for writing contemporary history is that the history of past generations was often already covered by others, making another work concerning the same period liable to be redundant. Some aspect of style from prior historians could be imitated,¹¹¹ but traditions that had already been handed down from other historians were allowed to stand and

¹⁰⁶ *History* 1.1, 1.22.

¹⁰⁷ *Histories* 1.1

¹⁰⁸ *Wars of the Jews*, 1.pr.

¹⁰⁹ *History* 1.20.3.

¹¹⁰ Momigliano 1969:130.

¹¹¹ Marincola 1997:15.

only be challenged on minor details; once it had been covered, the case was not reopened.¹¹²

Thucydides did not attempt to write the history of the first half of the fifth century all over again, but started from where Herodotus left off.¹¹³ Xenophon's *Hellenica* picked up the account of the war where Thucydides' had ended. Polybius said that although other historians had written about particular events, his own work was unique in composing a general history that incorporates and connects the events together.¹¹⁴ Distant history would not need to be re-written unless there were gaps in the old narratives that the historian believed he could re-interpret or fill with other evidence available, which is precisely what Ephorus, Livy, and Tacitus did.¹¹⁵ Filling in a gap could serve to justify the biographer's quest, because writing about a single life from an area of distant history already covered would not be redundant if information was gathered from various other sources and analyzed from a new angle. Plutarch justifies his *Life of Nicias* this way, saying he will not duplicate Thucydides, but try to include information from little-known sources to give a fresh picture of Nicias.¹¹⁶ Marincola comments, 'the prohibition on non-contemporary history could be ignored when the author believed he had superior information.'¹¹⁷ Therefore, inquiry into the contemporary is not inherent to generic history; the inherency is rather the opportunity to excel in a work of literature about the past, a factor in common with biography.

Beyond the practical reasons, we may also point out that the division between contemporary and distant history as categories was not even explicitly made by the Greeks.

Historians wrote both current events and past events and did not hesitate to consider it all part of

¹¹² Marincola 1997:105-106. Marincola adds that they could still disagree with details, weigh and compare more reliable accounts, or retell in summary form, but there was no 'tearing the whole edifice down and starting from the beginning.'

¹¹³ Stadter 2012:39.

¹¹⁴ *Histories* 1.4

¹¹⁵ Momigliano 1969:131.

¹¹⁶ *Nic.* 1.1-5. Later, we will argue that Plutarch made deductions from his sources to make a unique contribution with his biographies as well.

¹¹⁷ Marincola 1997:99.

their inquiry. Fornara asserts, ‘It is essential to recognize that, to the Greeks and Romans, “history” was not an aspect of time; “the past” and history were no more intrinsically related than were “the present” and history. The relation was identical for both: “history” was written both of the present and of the past.’¹¹⁸ Marincola doubts whether the distinction often made between the more antiquarian Roman ‘annalists’ and contemporary Roman historians is accurate.¹¹⁹ Even antiquarianism as a category did not develop fully until later in the Imperial period, after *bios* was well-established as a genre. The word for antiquarian, *archaeologia*, was used in *Hippias Major* to describe the study of genealogies or the ancient history of cities, but in Hellenistic writing became synonymous with archaic history.¹²⁰ As Momigliano emphasizes, ‘There has never been an absolute divorce, a precise criterion of separation between antiquarianism and historiography.’¹²¹

This is further supported by the fact that contemporary historians did include stories, information, or speculations about prior times and used documents, even if it made up a fraction of their work. As noted above, Herodotus and Thucydides, key figures in the development of history (and contemporary history) used documentation. In his first book, Thucydides spends the first twenty sections on the distant past, as well as further background on the fifty years leading up to the Peloponnesian War in ‘Pentecontaetia’ section of book one. Pearson observes that one important aspect of Hellenistic historians is their ‘convention to start their histories from the beginning.’¹²² Timaeus, Hellanicus, and Ephorus reached back as early as they could, discussing the founding of cities and stories of the heroic age.¹²³ While the *Jewish Wars* of Josephus are contemporary history of the first century CE, his other history, *Antiquities of the Jews*, spent 17

¹¹⁸ Fornara 1983:91.

¹¹⁹ Marincola 1999:289-290.

¹²⁰ Momigliano 1969:3-4. This is what it meant for Josephus and Dionysius of Halicarnassus.

¹²¹ Momigliano 1969:216.

¹²² Pearson 1987:2.

¹²³ Pearson 1987:2.

of the 20 books on events prior to the first century. Josephus made extensive use of documents as well, including Roman records and Greek historical sources in discussing the Jews under Hellenistic rule and debates concerning the origins of written records.¹²⁴

Overall, use of documents was increasingly more common in Greek historiographical development. ‘By the end of the fourth century,’ Rhodes notes, ‘it had come to be seen that documents were an invaluable source for certain kinds of information,’ such as constitutional arrangements, decisions of organizational bodies, lists, and treaties.¹²⁵ Other genres related to history are commonly listed to be genealogy, ethnography, horography, and chronography.¹²⁶ Such organization into sub-genres has received some criticism, as it does not always represent the ancient’s own categories and literary development.¹²⁷ cursory reading of Greek historians shows that this kind of material finds its way into history proper – historians, once again, must use documents and study them to make a point, as Polybius said. If historians incorporated written documentation and inquiry from previous generations into their methods, and if the frequency of writing contemporary history stems from the practical situations we have suggested, then there is not a marked difference between history and biography in terms of erudite research. Biography need not be placed into an antiquarian category away from political history.

Moral purpose in historiography

Biography is sometimes contrasted with history from its moral standpoint. In Fornara’s discussion of his list of historical writing, for example, he comments, ‘we exclude biography

¹²⁴ Rhodes 2007:65.

¹²⁵ Rhodes 2007:64.

¹²⁶ Fornara 1983:4-29.

¹²⁷ See Marincola 1999:283-301.

because it is an ethical, not historical form.’¹²⁸ On the contrary, however, we will argue that moralism positively argues for links between history and biography, because Greek historians included significant moral aims in their work as well.

Ancient historiography’s moral purposes are often not recognized due to the influence of Thucydides on our perception of the genre, but as Hornblower comments, Thucydides’ lack of moralizing is unusual compared to other ancient historians, and he was actually a ‘deeply moral writer’ in a qualified sense.¹²⁹ Thucydides did not make ethical statements with attention to the gods. His account of the plague in Athens is a representative case, noting that whether someone was bad or good they died and the gods took no care,¹³⁰ a statement other more pious historians like Xenophon would never make. However, Thucydides was concerned for the ethical implications of war, and the deterioration of the moral compass of individuals caught up in the hardship and pressures of warfare.¹³¹ Furthermore, Thucydides still revealed moral opinions on occasion, such as his negative portrayal of Kleon and his tactics, or his comment that Nicias was virtuous.¹³² Thucydides was aware of the instructive function for his work, and is inevitably related to a way of life. Momigliano writes, ‘Thucydides concentrated on political life; it was here that he found the meaning of human effort. By understanding the political life of the present, and its military consequences, he believed that he had understood the nature of man in its perennial elements.’¹³³

Herodotus set some precedents for moral themes in history as well, and placed them within his explanation of historical causation. Some unsavory deed would result in other events,

¹²⁸ Fornara 1983:3.

¹²⁹ Hornblower 1987:133.

¹³⁰ *History* 2.53.

¹³¹ Hornblower 1987:156-159.

¹³² Hornblower 1987:177. Hornblower clarifies that Thucydides is not a moralist in the sense that ‘he does not seek straightforwardly to improve his readers.’

¹³³ Momigliano 1969:214.

such as various parties stealing women from each other and bringing longstanding conflict.¹³⁴ He also looks at attitudes, especially *hubris*. Herodotus suggests that divine retribution came on Croesus because he thought himself the happiest of all men, and Xerxes' punishment of the Hellespont is told with disapproval and a foreshadowing of the Persian failure, a point to which he returns in the speech of Themistocles.¹³⁵ Political history had a life-instructing aspect; even if it was without specific ethical aims, it did have didactic aims. Herodotus and Thucydides imply that authentic lessons could be learned from history by the reader, beyond providing mere entertainment.

Xenophon's historical writing is one of the most outstanding for its ethical themes. Gray argues that morality is the unifying theme of the *Hellenica*.¹³⁶ The *Hellenica* does not have a strongly stated theme as found in the works of Herodotus or Thucydides, and the focus is not entirely upon military or political issues, though they are included.¹³⁷ Important issues such as the Second Athenian Confederacy, the extent of the expansive Theban sphere of influence, or political events in Persia are not mentioned – a glaring absence.¹³⁸ What did interest Xenophon is the moral aspect of the stories, and this is a major feature of his interpretation and inclusion of historical events. The interview of Cyrus and Lysander, or the duelling speeches in the accounts of Critias and Thrasybulus, are examples of the large spreads of narrative that were centred on dialogues and speeches of moral character, reducing the centrality of military actions.¹³⁹ Even the military actions are narrated so as to demonstrate the character of a good military leader.¹⁴⁰ There is also implicit warning against good leadership gone too far. Hau notices a pattern where

¹³⁴ On the kidnapping and causation of the conflicts, see 1.1-5.

¹³⁵ See *Histories* 1.34 for Croesus, and 7.35-36 and 8.109 for the Hellespont punishment.

¹³⁶ Gray 1989:178-182.

¹³⁷ Gray 1989:178.

¹³⁸ Gray 1989:178-179.

¹³⁹ Gray 1989:176.

¹⁴⁰ Gray 1989:177.

‘success leads to arrogance, which leads to disaster,’ a model of historical causality that appears to be a major teaching point in the *Hellenica*.¹⁴¹ For Xenophon, historiography was an ethical form as well.

Xenophon’s idea to include ethical material influenced succeeding historians.¹⁴² The historical works of Theopompus only survive in fragments, but they show ethical judgments on historical characters, such as asserting Athenaeus the Eretrian to be a flatterer, or that Lysander was hard-working, moderate, and ‘in control of his pleasures.’¹⁴³ The pronouncements of Theopompus were controversial. Lucian attacked the character of Theopompus, calling him malicious, and a ‘prosecutor rather than a historian.’¹⁴⁴ Other writers critique Theopompus as well, most notably Polybius for his unbecoming slanders of Philip;¹⁴⁵ nevertheless, the complaints against Theopompus are not against his moralism as such, but his negativity, or ‘bitterness’ as Cicero called it.¹⁴⁶ Plutarch remarks that Theopompus praises so infrequently in comparison to his blaming, that when he does praise one is more inclined to trust him.¹⁴⁷ Theopompus represents a type of moralist history that went too far according to other Greek writers, but no writer questioned that history had ethical ramifications.

Polybius held ethical views of his own which appear throughout his work. Eckstein asserts that ‘among the ancient historical writers now extant, no one more frequently breaks his narrative in order to comment in moralizing terms on human character and the lessons of life’ than Polybius.¹⁴⁸ Polybius disliked drunkenness and took considerable length to portray it in a

¹⁴¹ Hau 2012:607.

¹⁴² Hau 2012:608.

¹⁴³ F18 and F20 in Shrimpton 1991:218.

¹⁴⁴ *How to Write History* 59.

¹⁴⁵ *Histories* 8.11.

¹⁴⁶ Shrimpton 1991:21-27.

¹⁴⁷ F333.

¹⁴⁸ Eckstein 1995:17.

negative light and uphold examples of sobriety.¹⁴⁹ Virtues such as courage, mercy, and trustworthiness were also admired. Polybius considered reader improvement one of his goals in writing history, to expose the good and just for the reader's imitation.¹⁵⁰ Noble deeds help to educate the reader to be honest and a loyal friend, a certain kind of virtuous person.¹⁵¹ When Polybius gives lengthy comments on the misfortune of the Roman consul Regulus and his errors, he adds 'This I mention for the sake of the improvement of the readers of this history. For there are two ways by which all men can reform themselves, the one through their own mischances, the other through those of others, and of these the former is the more impressive, but the latter the less hurtful.'¹⁵² This moralistic idea of 'reader improvement' is methodological statement, very much akin to Plutarch's opinions about historical writing. Hau observes that compared to the unspoken messages and implications in Xenophon's narratives, these other Hellenistic historians 'comment unambiguously on the narrated situations and set out the moral explicitly for the reader.'¹⁵³ Further, it is significant that moral interest was not limited to the Greeks: the Roman historical writers such as Sallust, Livy and Tacitus had strong moral themes as well, duly taking note from Greek examples.¹⁵⁴

The moral concern in the histories has two ramifications: first, that it is not helpful to place a barrier between ethical and historical forms. History's words and deeds of characters and peoples were meant to instruct. Second, there is a precise overlap here between biography and history. History could be as morally instructive as biographies. Both genres were didactic and were expected by the audiences to uphold historical examples of people's actions to imitate or avoid.

¹⁴⁹ See Eckstein 1995:285-289 for a brief analysis.

¹⁵⁰ Eckstein 1995:22.

¹⁵¹ *Histories* 61.6.

¹⁵² *Histories* 1.35. Cf. 1.72.6-7.

¹⁵³ Hau 2012:609.

¹⁵⁴ See Marincola 1997:29.

Points of contact and separation between historiography and biography

Historiography and biography share significant points of contact – both genres are capable of looking to the distant past, employing documentary evidence and critical methods, maintaining an instructive purpose, and explicating the roles of important individuals. Having established important similarities to history, we should point out the major differences. Three important differences could be posited: length, intended coverage of the narrative, and the theoretical model.

Histories were longer than biographies by a fairly wide margin. The differing length is no longer sustained in modern practice, but it was a defining contrast in Greek biography.¹⁵⁵ Herodotus had nine books, Thucydides, eight, and Xenophon's *Hellenica*, seven. The universal historians had even more – Ephorus filled thirty books, Timaeus, thirty-eight, and Polybius, forty. Biographies tended to be much smaller works and a single *bios* would not cover multiple books. The biographies by Nepos are between two and ten pages long, while Plutarch's are fifty pages on average.¹⁵⁶ A pair of Plutarch's Lives with prologue and *synkrisis* were contained in a single book.¹⁵⁷ Although Philo's *Life of Moses* is unusually long for a *bios*, it took up only two scrolls.¹⁵⁸

The widely divergent lengths between them is a convention that is directly related to the intended scope¹⁵⁹ of the narratives. In view of the numerous methodological and thematic similarities seen above, the breadth of coverage appears to be the major difference between history and biography, one which divides them generically. History has the wider scope in that it is narrating and explaining larger entities and their interactions. Thucydides and historians with a

¹⁵⁵ Two extreme examples are the official biography of Winston Churchill by Martin Gilbert, which runs 8 volumes and *A Little History of the World* by E.H. Gombrich which runs 309 pages.

¹⁵⁶ Hägg 2012:241.

¹⁵⁷ Duff 2011b:213-214.

¹⁵⁸ Burridge 2004:135.

¹⁵⁹ 'Scope' is defined here as the material parameters the literary work is intended to cover.

localized scope see collective bodies as actors in the narrative (such as a *poleis* or empires) insofar as they intrude into the locality in focus. Universal history is more ambitious, an attempt to cover everything that is known to the author, and rests on the foundation of ‘a universal conception of time and space in which the actor is mankind’, as Alfonso- Núñez remarks.¹⁶⁰

In the few places where writers speak about biography and history in the same place, scope is the major contrast. In his preface to *Pelopidas*, Cornelius Nepos comments on the balance his own approach requires – to avoid telling all of the deeds Pelopidas lest his readers will think it a history, or on the other side to tell too little and some readers be unaware of the leader’s greatness.¹⁶¹ Plutarch says the ‘multitude of deeds’ of Alexander and Caesar are so great that he cannot cover everything, then explains that he is writing lives rather than histories.¹⁶² Therefore, the important question to be answered on the relationship between historiographical and biographical method is this: what determines the boundaries of scope? In the mass of evidence before the historian and biographer, what determines what is included in the final work and what is discarded? This question brings their respective theoretical models to the fore.

The application of the biographical method yields an individual-centred focus. When Plutarch and Nepos write of excluding certain information from *bioi*, there is a methodological reason for saying so. Their concentration is upon one person, and this must determine the scope of their narrative. When Nepos voices concern that he not write history, he is drawing his limits. Including only enough material about Pelopidas to show his greatness necessarily excludes some material. That biography has a theory of composition that influences what data is included is noted by a number of scholars.¹⁶³ Obviously, Greek historians also believed character was

¹⁶⁰ Alonso-Núñez 2002:11.

¹⁶¹ *Pelopidas* 16.1.

¹⁶² *Alex.* 1.1.

¹⁶³ See Wardman 1974:4-8, Pelling 2011:102-107.

important to history whether explicitly stated, as Polybius did, or implied, as in the inclusion of profiles of the executed Greek generals in Xenophon's *Anabasis*.¹⁶⁴

However, it is clear that character was not the sole criterion for writing history proper, as it was in biography; it was only one of many strands in broad narratives. Wardman writes that characterization within historiography 'is only incidental to other interests' and that when Xenophon sketches Menon's character in *Anabasis*, it does not appear as a theme throughout the narrative or become significant later in the story.¹⁶⁵ Concerning the programmatic statements of Plutarch's *Lives*, Pelling says this: 'The theory is clear and consistent. Biography will often concentrate on personal details, and may abbreviate its historical narrative; its concern will be the portrayal of character, and its ultimate purpose will be protreptic and moral.'¹⁶⁶ Similarly, Fornara writes that the evidence collected was studied by the biographer in order to discover what kind of life and character his subject had. He concludes, 'history, the record of man's memorable deeds, was irrelevant to biography except when deeds illuminated character. Conversely, subjects for illustration suitable to biography – for example, a sense of humor indicated by characterizing anecdotes – were unsuitable for history.'¹⁶⁷ Characterizing evidence, however, is still a historical matter, as will be shown in Chapter 4. Further, memorable deeds of *bios* may be mentioned which do not necessarily illuminate character explicitly, but provide some important function related to the broader purpose of the model.

This leads us to the problem that biographers do not always appear to follow their own theory. Pelling notes in Plutarch's case that there are a number of points where he appears to

¹⁶⁴ See *Histories* 9.22 and 5.39, *Anabasis* 2.6.

¹⁶⁵ Wardman 1974:6.

¹⁶⁶ Pelling 2011:102.

¹⁶⁷ Fornara 1983:185.

deviate from the method asserted in his prefaces.¹⁶⁸ This will be discussed further in the next chapter, but there are three points appropriate to mention now. First, Plutarch was not alone in his apparent departures, as the methodological statements of Greek historians often lead to more complications upon further inquiry.¹⁶⁹ Second, giving more context for the hero's life contributed to the ethical-didactic purpose of the biographer's model. Third, generic rules of *bioi* were flexible, as argued above, and could allow additional information so long as it did not make the biography too lengthy. Again, genre as reader expectation is helpful here – *bios* must be centred upon the person rather than too much into the broader scheme of the historical situation. How much background or diversion is too much depends upon the decision of the author and what the audience will reasonably allow. Even the genre of historiography faced the inverse of this problem, as Imperial Rome progressively witnessed histories becoming more biographically focused due to the increasing importance of the Roman emperor, something the readers would expect as participants in this new situation.¹⁷⁰

Historiographical theory, ancient and present

The ancient biographies differed from histories in scope and focus on a generic level. However, can the biographical method be considered a historiographical method? It has already been established that history and biography share many other features, and the writers of both drew from documents and experience to write on historical events and people with an ethical-didactical vision. What remains is to demonstrate that this theory of evidence selection and composition meets the expectation of historiographical method, the meaning of which must be addressed before proceeding.

¹⁶⁸ Pelling 2011:102-107.

¹⁶⁹ See Pitcher 2009:25-45.

¹⁷⁰ Fornara 1983:186.

The challenge to be met is the nature of the association between historians of Greco-Roman epochs and critical historians of today. Marincola remarks, 'Perhaps the most fundamental shift over the last thirty years has been the recognition, with all of its attendant consequences, of a significant break between ancient civilization and our own.'¹⁷¹ Yet he also notes the possible problem of falling into a 'modern superiority complex.'¹⁷² This possibility has taken the form of a strong skepticism in some quarters. For example, Finley asserts that 'the ability of the ancients to invent and their capacity to believe are persistently underestimated.'¹⁷³ Finley goes on to question the dubious nature of their material on early Rome, created to fill unwanted gaps in their knowledge.¹⁷⁴ To this problem may be added the invention of speeches in historical works and its apparent acceptance, since any invention is antithetical to modern historiography. Woodman argued that it is not viable to believe 'that classical historiography resembles its modern namesake' and that the ancients viewed it as 'rhetorical genre' like poetry.¹⁷⁵ There is also the problem of how much intellectual and cultural development has occurred. Loraux argues under the searching title, 'Thucydides is not a Colleague,' that we must maintain serious distance from the ancient historians and their context, because their aims were limited to the immediate situation, and are at variance with the answers we now seek.¹⁷⁶ Thucydides should not be seen as a master historian telling us modern historians how things really were; rather, his work should be allowed a 'status as a text, taking in this way enough distance to constitute it as a document,' a piece of writing on par with comedies, poetry, or epics from which we can glean information for our own inquiry.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷¹ Marincola 2011:4.

¹⁷² Marincola 2011:5, n. 9.

¹⁷³ Finley 1985:9.

¹⁷⁴ Finley 1985:9.

¹⁷⁵ Woodman 1988:x.

¹⁷⁶ Loraux 2011:19-39.

¹⁷⁷ Loraux 2011:35.

Such progress notwithstanding, there is a real danger of exaggerating the differences and diminishing the accomplishments of ancient historians. Though it is not precisely the form and critical type of historiography practiced now, ancient historiography is still historiography. That distance should be given between us and texts like that of Thucydides is evident, because their context does not equal our own. Nevertheless, even speaking of ‘our’ context is problematic, as today there are historians across cultures and nations with a multiplicity of perspectives and questions concerning history. The famous quotation from L.P. Hartley, ‘The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there,’ portrays one way in which we understand our relationship to the past as historians. Just as when one encounters new, unfamiliar cultures in our time and grapples with the challenges of understanding and interpreting them, the historian must be aware of gaps in understanding when encountering the past.¹⁷⁸ When one approaches another culture or country there is another conceptual, linguistic, and moral framework to understand, as is the case in any study of history. If scholars from such culturally diverse countries as China, Egypt, and the United States can be colleagues today, it is not too far from perception to consider ancient Greek and Roman historians in the same vein, even while their texts additionally serve as monumental documents, as Loraux has shown.

This is further strengthened by the influence ancient historiography has exerted on the development of western historiography.¹⁷⁹ The precise nature of the continuity of ideas through history is still controversial in the field of intellectual history,¹⁸⁰ and is outside the scope of this dissertation, though all that must be established now is a broader ‘path of thinking,’ as Gordon

¹⁷⁸ This point is owed to comments from Prof. Paul Kruger of Stellenbosch University, May 2013.

¹⁷⁹ See Momigliano 1990.

¹⁸⁰ Lovejoy 1936 emphasized the development of singular ideas, but since Skinner 1969’s argument for a more contextual approach, the nature of the history of ideas has been debated.

says, in historiography while remembering the alternate contexts.¹⁸¹ Some have argued that ahistorical, fictitious features, such as speeches or narratives from historians of whom we are suspicious, are more historically grounded than is often believed.¹⁸² When the ancient weaknesses are accepted, it must be allowed that over the course of millennia it would be expected that a significant development of historiography would occur, shifts in conceptions of the world in philosophy, logic, and natural science. Collingwood has shown that we ought to be careful to judge historical concepts and theories within their own context, as the meaning of many concepts has shifted over the course of time.¹⁸³ Even with the revolution of ‘scientific history’ in the nineteenth century, where more advanced methods were developed, postmodern critics have shown issues inherent to historical discourse which plague critical historiography today as well.¹⁸⁴

There is also enough continuity between ancient and modern historiography to surmise that it is essentially the same activity. One example is the respect for truth. The *Histories* of Herodotus are a more amusing and interesting narrative than the dense style of Thucydides, yet Thucydides ultimately became more important to many Greeks because it was believed that Herodotus told lies.¹⁸⁵ Greek and Roman historians were acutely aware of truth and falsehood in history, a theme commonly discussed in Polybius’ work.¹⁸⁶ Lucian criticizes historians’ factual errors, not only arising from prejudice, but errors of fact as such, which, as Pitcher comments, ‘is

¹⁸¹ See Gordon 2012.

¹⁸² For instance, Fornara’s 1983:142-168 argument for greater credibility for ancient speeches, or Hornblower’s 1987:17-25 defense of Herodotus.

¹⁸³ Collingwood 1978:53-76. For instance, the suggestion that a state not perform public animal sacrifice would be met with incredulous to ancient minds, but sacrifice is far from the public square in most modern nations. However, change does not deny continuity, as in this example the idea and logic of sacrifice developed in new ways into the modern period, and is still present in society, as Halbertal 2012 shows.

¹⁸⁴ See Jenkins 1995 for a postmodern position, and Appleby et al. 1994 provides a solid overview, with a mediating position.

¹⁸⁵ Momigliano 1969:127-142.

¹⁸⁶ *Histories* 3.21, 12.3-28a.

hard to square with the idea that it was universally acknowledged in classical antiquity that factual accuracy did not form part of the concept of “truth” as it pertained to historiography.’¹⁸⁷ History was a branch of rhetoric as Woodman has emphasized, but under that rhetoric existed an idea that truth still mattered.

Another example is bias in history, the awareness of which is not new. Among extant Greek works, Polybius is the first to discuss bias head-on, and later Sallust and Josephus make significant mention of it.¹⁸⁸ In fact, eliminating bias became a competitive factor in cases where historians wrote on the same period as their predecessors and attempted to surpass their accounts by being more objective.¹⁸⁹ Rhetoric and historiography were closely interconnected, though this does not mean ‘the truth’ was unimportant, or that there was free invention, even in the presence of bias or exaggeration.¹⁹⁰

Organizational strategies have also been influential. The histories of Ephorus were written in a topical arrangement within certain sets of chronological sections, a revolutionary organizational principle of large-scale history that was imitated by subsequent Greek historians and is used in modern histories today, such as the *Cambridge Ancient Histories*.¹⁹¹ Lucian’s *True Stories*, although satires rather than history proper, even preclude several key strands of postmodern historiography arguments, particularly those of White.¹⁹² Indeed, Greek historians were still affected by biases and personal perspectives and ideas, but historians today face the same problem, which has become increasingly recognized. As Pitcher insightfully comments,

¹⁸⁷ Pitcher 2009:20.

¹⁸⁸ Luce 2011:291.

¹⁸⁹ Marincola 1997:114-115.

¹⁹⁰ Bosworth 2003:167-198, who also specifically addresses Woodman 1988.

¹⁹¹ Fornara 1983:45.

¹⁹² Greenwood 2006:120.

‘Ancient historiography is not always as ancient, or modern historiography as modern, as is often supposed.’¹⁹³

Historians interpret texts, and they do this according to some kind of intellectual framework. Debates concerning truth and subjectivity in historiography are ongoing and varied, and it is not necessary to survey them here.¹⁹⁴ Though disagreements exist over the nature of historical truth and discourse, all sides of the debate are compatible with the existence of theories or ideas as drivers of historiographical thought and writing.¹⁹⁵ This is a significant point of contact between modern and ancient historians, as ancient historians used theories as well.¹⁹⁶ The explicit idea that historians are to interpret the past is never clearly outlined in the range of ancient historiography, though Hornblower notes that this is what they were doing, and the Roman historian Sempronius Asellio plainly stated that relating what had happened is deficient by itself because why those things happened should be included in history as well.¹⁹⁷ Collingwood went so far as to argue that ‘all history is the history of thought,’ and ‘when a historian says a man is in a certain situation, this is the same as saying that he thinks he is in this situation. The hard facts of the situation, which it is so important for him to face, are the hard facts of the way in which he conceives the situation.’¹⁹⁸ Finley similarly states, ‘The study and

¹⁹³ Pitcher 2009:181.

¹⁹⁴ See Evans 1997, Jenkins 1995, Appleby et al. 1994, and Carr 1990.

¹⁹⁵ Historians may see the nature of the theory very differently – some decry the use of ‘ideology’ in historical writing as opposed to ‘objective’ historiography, while others would argue that one person’s ‘science’ is another person’s ideology says White 1985:69. The merits of this controversy aside, even those with such a scientific view of historiography are using a method based upon ideas. Traditionalist historians would not believe their objective methods to be arbitrary, as postmodern historians might believe, yet even if they are not arbitrary they are still ideologically informed models, albeit the ‘right’ ones by their conviction.

¹⁹⁶ To speak of ancients using ‘theory’ or ‘models’ is anachronistic, but it is still a useful way to speak of what they were doing. Modern writers inevitably use specialized, contemporary terms to interpret and communication ancient thought. For example, many ancient cultures, including Greece, had no word for ‘religion’ as conceived in modern thought, yet religion is presumed acceptable term to describe rituals and beliefs of the past and make it communicable (Hinnells 2007:3). It is appropriate to use any term which accurately describes the activity being accomplished, even if the term was not used at that time.

¹⁹⁷ Hornblower 1987:26.

¹⁹⁸ Collingwood 1946:317.

writing of history, in short, is a form of ideology' in the broad sense of systems of ideas in collective and individual entities.¹⁹⁹ Fischer defines a historian as 'someone (anyone) who asks an open-ended question about past events and answers it with selected facts which are arranged in the form of an explanatory paradigm.'²⁰⁰ Livy, a very prolific historian, still would state his own limits, that since it was difficult enough to tell the numerous deeds of the Romans, the wars between other nations were not to be discussed.²⁰¹ That choices must be made is normal.

Speaking primarily of modern historians, Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob say this:

[...] historians must deal with a vanished past that has left most of its traces in written documents. The translation of these words from the documents into the story that seeks to be faithful to the past constitutes the historians' particular struggle with truth. It requires a rigorous attention to the details of the archival records as well as imaginative casting of narrative and interpretation. The realist never denies that the very act of representing the past makes the historian (values, warts, and all) an agent who actively molds how the past is to be seen.²⁰²

Historiography also has to do with choices about inclusion of historical data, and it is in this sense that the term will be applied in explaining the interpretive choices of Plutarch. Sorting through documents and asking certain questions of texts – questions which the texts may not have been originally intended to answer – very well describes what biographers like Plutarch were doing. By pulling together various sources, thinking about what the texts say happened, and noticing details, the biographer creates a new narrative. Biographers make choices using a more restrictive interpretive theory than history proper, centring the narrative upon a single person. That historiography is ideological helps explain the patterns in Plutarch's *Lives*, as we will argue in the next chapter. Plutarch had definite ideas about what kind of things happen in human affairs, which influenced the way he saw history and interpreted historical sources. For example,

¹⁹⁹ Finley 1985: 4.

²⁰⁰ Fischer 1971:xv.

²⁰¹ Livy 41.25.8.

²⁰² Appleby et al. 1994:249.

his view of Greek politics is repeated often in the *Lives*, at times missing the distinctiveness of Roman politics in explaining many political situations.²⁰³

That ideas present in *bioi* may not be those of political historians of the stripe of Thucydides or Polybius is therefore no hindrance. Ancient historians came from a wide variety of backgrounds – statesmen, philosophers, generals, or rhetoricians – and they brought with them ideas from their experience, be they political ideologies or metaphysical hypotheses. The current situation of history as a profession has only solidified in the past few centuries, and even in modern times ideas from other background fields, such as literary theory, philosophy, and economic theory, have influenced historiography. It is uncontroversial to speak of ‘schools’ of history based upon political affiliation or social science theories.²⁰⁴ The 20th century saw a plethora of new interpretive paradigms for viewing the past, and expanded the field considerably. Models such as Marxist history and Feminist history are theories which are applied to evidence of the past and interpreted accordingly.²⁰⁵ A biography is doing much the same thing: an explanatory paradigm constructed around an individual, gathering evidence that shows their ethical character, actions, and whatever else and interpreting it according to relevance to that individual. The product itself is need not be a ‘history’ in the sense the ancients understood it; rather, the techniques of historians are implemented in the creation of the product with one individual as the locus of thought. Even many modern genres outside the purview of history involve historiographical method in some sense. A philosophical monograph may have a historical prologue in the first chapters, in which selected historical data is interpreted by the philosophy, and then proceed to arguments in the rest of the book. Historiography is not limited to strictly generic history, and is open to biographers as well.

²⁰³ Pelling 2011:218.

²⁰⁴ White 1985:67.

²⁰⁵ See Appleby et al. 1994:129-237.

The standards and diversity of modern historiography aid our contention that the biographical model is a historiographical method. Historiographical method consists in interpretation and serious thinking about the past. If the composers of biographies are doing this kind of interpretation and thinking, it should be considered a historiographical method. Our question is to what extent Plutarch did this, which remains to be demonstrated in the next chapters.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that the *bios* genre could incorporate historical method. Due to the close genealogical relationship between the historical and biographic, there is theoretically much work that the biographer can do that would be like history, and using the kinds of methods that historians use as well. That the genres of the Greco-Roman world were malleable, that historiography and biography share traits of moralism, use of documents to research the past, and critical models of interpretation of the evidence, all support a close relationship between historiography and biography. Having shown that it is theoretically possible that the sources of Plutarch have a historiographical function and could be interpreted according to historical method, the next chapters will examine Plutarch's usage of Thucydides and see whether this is an appropriate description.

CHAPTER 2: Plutarch's Intellectual Influences and Paradigms of Historiography

This chapter will elucidate Plutarch's intellectual background and perspective on history in order to map out what our expectations should be for his use of historiographical method in his reading of Thucydides. Plutarch will be placed within his wider cultural and intellectual context, illustrating his affinity for interpretive care and what sorts of ideologies influenced his writing and theoretical models for the *Lives*. Since we are arguing that Plutarch is doing historiography, it is important to construct his contemporary situation to see what his influences would be for interpreting history. His responsibilities in his community affected how he approached writing, as well as what he would desire to relay to his audience. After discussing his personal background, we will probe into his philosophy, because philosophy is central to studying any historical writing, especially for an avowed philosopher as Plutarch was. It will be shown that Plutarch gleaned from other philosophical schools, especially from Aristotle, but he was a steadfast Platonist. Platonism and Peripatetic thought combined to give him a robust interpretive paradigm for the past consisting of Platonic dogmas, critical method, an ethical view of history, and respect for traditional authorities. From here, Plutarch's programmatic statements and other comments will be examined to illuminate his purposes and idea of history, and therefore the biographical theory he espoused. We will see that Plutarch considered his *Lives* to be historical, and his methods of composition treated his sources as such. This being Plutarch's historiographical theory, we will be prepared to see how this worked out in practice for the *Pericles* and *Nicias* in the next chapter.

Plutarch's Situation and Intellectual Background

Although Plutarch proudly maintained his permanent residence in Chaeronea, he travelled well beyond his hometown, visiting Alexandria, Rome, and elsewhere in Italy and

Asia.²⁰⁶ These travels include places where events in the *Lives* occurred, giving him a basic awareness of geography, the quality Polybius valued in a researcher of history. In his youth Plutarch studied under the Platonist philosopher Ammonius in Athens. Political missions brought him to Rome, and he spent some time in the city giving lectures on philosophy as well. Plutarch was an avid reader, as is evident from his frequent quotations from numerous poets, playwrights, historians, and philosophers. The *Lives* alone cite at least 275 authors by name, and there were undoubtedly even more authors who were not named to avoid disrupting the flow of his narratives.²⁰⁷ This situation gave him deep understanding of the position of Greece under the authority of Rome and informed the aims of the *Lives*.

His identities as priest, local statesman, and philosopher moulded Plutarch as a writer. He was a member of the council of the Amphictyonic League which helped maintain the shrine, and was also a priest with financial and ritual duties for at least twenty years at Delphi.²⁰⁸ Some of his works such as *On the E at Delphi* and *On the Cessation of Oracles* reflect his involvement with and devotion to the shrine. Plutarch believed in the gods' justice and benevolence, and he even engaged in theodicy through his essay *On the Delay of Divine Vengeance*. Piety was important to Plutarch, though he sharply distinguished it from superstition, which is criticized heavily in several places.²⁰⁹

His political activity was under the structure of Roman government. Opinions regarding the situation under Roman rule can appear positive, in that he recognizes the peace and stability Rome had brought to Greece.²¹⁰ However, Duff notices that he does not place the Romans as the cause of peace, nor praises Roman gifts to Delphi in essays related to the site, implying 'not a

²⁰⁶ Russell 1973:7.

²⁰⁷ Lamberton 2001:13.

²⁰⁸ Lamberton 2001:52-53.

²⁰⁹ See *On Superstition*, *Nic.-Crass. Syn.* 5.3.

²¹⁰ 408B-C.

passive acceptance of the *pax romana* but a studied indifference to Roman intrusion.²¹¹ Plutarch was a Roman citizen, with Roman friends, and spent time in Rome, leading Hägg to believe he was Roman as well as Greek, a man of two cultures.²¹² This may be an overstatement, however. His writings never mention the fact that he was a Roman citizen, which could imply it was not particularly important to him.²¹³ Even if he knew Latin better than he let on, as Hägg supposes, his background and environment was overwhelmingly Greek. He did not spend very long in Rome or incorporate himself deeply into Roman affairs, as Polybius and other Greeks had done. We can expect therefore that Plutarch would place a strongly Hellenic perspective on the past and current affairs and would not understand deeper aspects of Roman culture.

Nevertheless, Plutarch's audience for the *Lives* included both Greeks and Romans, who shared an interest in political affairs and education. Plutarch wrote for a well-educated and intelligent readership with the capacity to listen critically and make their own judgments upon the actions of the characters.²¹⁴ Romans were a dynamic component of his audience.²¹⁵ Plutarch dedicates the *Lives* to Sosius Senecio, a two-term consul and an advisor to emperor Trajan, and this likely indicates the two men knew each other, especially in view of *Aemilius* prologue, which itself may imply that he encouraged Plutarch to produce biographies in the first place.²¹⁶ Plutarch also wrote for fellow Greeks to contend that although Rome was in control, Greeks could still be active in their local polity. *Aratas* was dedicated to Polycrates, a descendent of Aratas himself and was meant to educate his sons.²¹⁷ Greeks being advised and encouraged into political life was one effect Plutarch hoped to achieve through the *Lives*, and this aim is

²¹¹ Duff 1999:292-293.

²¹² Hägg 2012:242.

²¹³ Von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf 1995:50. Of course, many of Plutarch's works are lost, but the silence is significant in the voluminous writings that remain.

²¹⁴ So argues Duff 2011a:59-82.

²¹⁵ For Plutarch's Roman audience, see Stadter 2015.

²¹⁶ Wardman 1974:38.

²¹⁷ Wardman, 1974:40.

displayed in his essay, *Precepts of Statecraft*, which recognized that a Greek statesman's participation in government was as a 'ruled ruler.'²¹⁸

All of this indicates that an interest in political acumen was shared between Plutarch and his audience. As opposed to a demagogue or a tyrant, Plutarch saw the good statesman, the *politicus*, as a man of virtue, who works for the moral betterment and peace of the entire community; he follows the rule of law, yet is 'many-sided' and acts shrewdly in the midst of challenging situations according to what is needed.²¹⁹ Plutarch's views were informed both by the illustrious Greek political history and the pragmatism of living under Roman rule, but philosophy influenced his politics much more. Plutarch had read Plato's treatment of the subject in the *Republic* and *Laws*, and was deeply affected by the importance of virtue and philosophy in government. Dion's association with Plato is explored in a positive tone in that *Life*, and Plato's effort to take philosophy to the tyrants is given respect.²²⁰ Roskam's survey of Plutarch's treatment of the public activity of professional philosophers shows he valued their political commitment (though sometimes over-imagining their political influence) and accentuates their actions more than their theories.²²¹ Plutarch drew from Aristotle's political thought as well. Aristotle was aligned with Plato's tradition of the philosopher as advisor to the ruler, theorizing that the wisdom of philosophy was essential for the true statesman; in other words, as Roskam summarizes, 'in order to be a good politician, one cannot but philosophise.'²²² Plutarch's essay *That a Philosopher Ought to Converse Especially with Men in Power* expresses precisely this idea of the close relationship between philosophy and statesmanship. The good political life for

²¹⁸ 813D-E and Wardman 1974:104.

²¹⁹ Wardman 1974:49-57.

²²⁰ *Dion* 1, 4.3, and 11.1-3.

²²¹ Roskam 2009:57.

²²² Roskam 2009:52.

Plutarch was also the philosophical life. And, as we will now show, it is Plutarch's philosophy that is most essential to understanding his biographical works.

Plutarch found himself on the margins of the Second Sophistic, a movement coinciding with Roman interest in Greek thought and looking back to Hellenistic philosophy.²²³ Plutarch looked to Hellenistic philosophy as well,²²⁴ though he was careful to distinguish 'philosophers' (the class in which he belonged) from 'sophists.' In his essay about listening to lectures, he says one must think seriously about the lecture's content, 'in order that we may acquire a habit of mind that is not sophistic or bent on acquiring mere information, but one that is deeply ingrained and philosophic, as we may do if we believe that right listening is the beginning of right living.'²²⁵ Plutarch distanced himself from the rhetoric of the sophists. He held that rhetoric was to be accepted as a tool rather than as an end in itself, that true end being the philosophical life.²²⁶

Plutarch has not always received respect as a philosopher over the centuries. Subsequent Neoplatonist philosophers knew Plutarch, but they were careful to distinguish 'Plutarch of Chaeronea' from 'Plutarch the philosopher,' another philosopher from Athens who shared his name, implying Plutarch was less than a full philosopher in their view.²²⁷ Plutarch as a moralist was recognized up through the Renaissance and Enlightenment, and nineteenth century scholarship gave him attention for source-hunting, but he was not commonly considered for philosophical argumentation or innovation of his own.²²⁸ However, Plutarch considered himself a philosopher, as did his friends and acquaintances, and even if he was not a master on the level

²²³ Anderson 1993:9-10.

²²⁴ Karamanolis 2014.

²²⁵ 48D.

²²⁶ See 33F.

²²⁷ Kechagia 2011:2.

²²⁸ See Stadter 1992:2, Karamanolis 2014.

of a Plotinus or Posidonius, there is good reason for us to agree with his self-assessment.²²⁹ Since Russell asserted in 1973 that the work of commenting on Plutarch ‘has in some senses hardly begun,’²³⁰ there has been a ‘resurgence of Plutarchan scholarship’²³¹ which increasingly recognizes Plutarch as a philosopher. Additionally, Dillon says that although ‘by no means a great original philosopher,’ Plutarch ‘is an important link in the chain of evidence for the development of Middle Platonism’ and ‘not quite devoid of originality in his doctrines.’²³² Some of Plutarch’s more complex philosophical works have not survived, although every one of his works is permeated by philosophy, especially that of a moral nature.²³³ Scientific and theological forays were not ends in themselves within his philosophy; rather, as Russell comments, ‘The centre of gravity of Plutarch’s philosophy lay in ethics.’²³⁴

One specific challenge we must consider is locating Plutarch as a specifically Platonist philosopher. By his self-understanding, Plutarch was a Platonist, but also was influenced by Pythagorean thought, the Peripatetics, and Stoics.²³⁵ Like Seneca to Stoicism, Plutarch’s extensive reading and wide range of quotations can give the impression of a somewhat looser connection to the Platonic school.²³⁶ His view of the creation of the world was rejected by later Neoplatonists, and was important enough for their rejection of him as an orthodox Platonist.²³⁷ Plutarch took an interest in Pythagorean thought, which shows in his *Life of Romulus*, as well as his discussions of vegetarianism and the traditional Pythagorean ban against eating beans.²³⁸

²²⁹ Karamanolis 2014.

²³⁰ Russell 1973:114.

²³¹ Kechagia 2011:3.

²³² Dillon 1996:185.

²³³ Dillon 1996:230.

²³⁴ Russell 1973:69. Hadot 2004 argues that this focus was common to all ancient philosophy.

²³⁵ Dillon 1996:186.

²³⁶ Dillon 1988:357-358 brings attention to our lack of evidence for an actual ‘Platonic school’ in Athens during Plutarch’s time, making the idea of ‘Platonic orthodoxy’ problematic, but we focus here on his allegiance to Plato despite other influences.

²³⁷ Dillon 1996:230.

²³⁸ See his essay *On the Eating of Flesh* and *Sympos.* II, 3, 635E respectively.

Pythagoreanism and Platonic thought had a respectful relationship, therefore this is not unusual.²³⁹ He was capable of stating positive notions of the Stoics, and probably owes the teaching principles of *How A Young Man Should Read Poetry* to Stoic hermeneutical thought.²⁴⁰ In agreement with Stoicism, he believed virtue to be paramount and sufficient in itself for attaining happiness.²⁴¹ Additionally, he praises the idea of ‘apathy’ (*apatheia*) toward misfortunes, a major Stoic concept, though he uses the term in a more nuanced sense to be the control of emotion rather than its total nonexistence.²⁴² Agreements aside, Plutarch still vigorously opposed both the Stoics and Epicureans in such works as *Against Colotes*, *On the Self-contradictions of the Stoics*, and *On Moral Virtue*, though many Stoics were considered worthy opponents as fellow philosophers, a respect he did not seem to give to Epicureans.²⁴³ Aristotle is named over two hundred times in Plutarch’s writings, and his grasp of key Aristotelian concepts reveals a broad, though not deep, knowledge of Aristotle’s works.²⁴⁴ Plutarch delineated the Peripatetic opposition to Plato’s Ideas and the immortality of the soul, but he never formally attacks them and actually incorporated their ideas into his Platonist thought (for reasons to be evident below).²⁴⁵ In all of these cases, Plato becomes the standard by which all other schools are judged, borrowing from other schools notwithstanding.

This shows that Opsomer was correct to say that Plutarch’s philosophy was ‘deeply Platonic’ and ‘willing to incorporate foreign ideas and techniques only insofar as they agree with the fundamental ideas and practices of Platonism.’²⁴⁶ In his dialogue *On the Divine Vengeance*,

²³⁹ See Horky 2013.

²⁴⁰ Lamberton 2001:50-51.

²⁴¹ Opsomer 2014:97-98.

²⁴² Wardman 1974:108.

²⁴³ Opsomer 2014:89.

²⁴⁴ Lamberton 2001:16-17.

²⁴⁵ Dillon 1996:186, n. 2. See *Against Colotes* 1115A.

²⁴⁶ Opsomer 2014:88, who also adds that since the 1916 monograph on Plutarch’s Platonism by R.M. Jones, scholarship has progressively established Plutarch as a Platonist.

Plutarch asserts an end-goal of life typical of Middle Platonists, to pattern oneself after the virtue and beauty of God.²⁴⁷ Another mark of Plutarch's allegiance to Platonism was his effort to solidify the Platonic chain of thought in light of its somewhat turbulent history. In the first century BCE, the dogmatic line of Antiochus and Eudorus broke away from the skeptical line of Arcesilaus and Carneades, and Plutarch sought a rapprochement of the two sides based upon his reading of Plato.²⁴⁸ Boys-Stones explains that skepticism in the Academy could be either articulated negatively as a method to avoid false beliefs, as Arcesilaus and Carneades seemed to stress, or positively as the only way to discover truth, as the later Metrodorus and Philo articulated.²⁴⁹

Plutarch's philosophical writings suggest a positive form of skepticism.²⁵⁰ His approach allowed a serious dialectic of questioning in an attempt to lay bias aside and aim to discover actual knowledge, and therefore juxtapose both suspension of judgment and belief in doctrine as viable options in philosophical thinking.²⁵¹ In effect, this turns skepticism into a methodology; this is how truth is found.²⁵² Plutarch sought to show continuity within Platonism throughout its history, from Socrates to his own day, and thereby revealed his own methodology for discovering truth, especially the type of philosophical truth which Plato discovered in his own dialectic.²⁵³

Plutarch's idea of questioning and skepticism to discover truths would influence his interpretations of historical facts, determine his choices of inclusion, and inform what message he is attempting to extol in his work. His Platonic pattern of critical questioning was very likely

²⁴⁷ Dillon 1996:192, 550D.

²⁴⁸ Karamanolis 2014.

²⁴⁹ Boys-Stones 1997:43.

²⁵⁰ Boys-Stones 1997:43-55.

²⁵¹ Karamanolis 2014.

²⁵² Karamanolis 2006:85.

²⁵³ Karamanolis 2014.

to influence his historiographical thinking and methodology. The same can be said for his respect for authority (see below), as Plato himself was an authority on all matters, and appeals to authority or authoritative tradition were a common feature of Platonic revival of this period.²⁵⁴ The results from this are profoundly important, because it brings history and philosophy into a very close relationship: good philosophy comes from understanding of good historical traditions. Pelling has noted that Plutarch uses this philosophical model to read history, and that ‘Platonic political philosophy can be a powerful analytic tool, affording a repertoire of, and for, historical evaluation.’²⁵⁵ We have seen that Plutarch connected good politics with good philosophy, and philosophy’s goal is ethics, which are informed the Divine. A Platonist idea of history appears when philosophy meets historical narrative.

Platonism also informed his ethics. Plutarch founded ethics on his metaphysics, especially from his understanding of Plato’s *Timaeus*, yet ethics were also revealed by deeds, a broadly Hellenistic philosophical concept.²⁵⁶ History is composed of individuals doing deeds, which inevitably intertwines ethics and history, making biography of individuals who have done great deeds a very appealing model for Plutarch’s historical research. Ethics in history have already been discussed in Chapter 1, but at present the problem arises of Peripatetic influence, since Plutarch’s ethical thinking was framed very much by Aristotle as well. Due to Aristotle’s systemization of key areas of philosophy, other philosophers, whether Peripatetic or not, found themselves operating from the clarity Aristotle provided, ‘playing Aristotle’s game’ as it were.²⁵⁷ Plutarch’s relationship with the Peripatetics deserves more scrutiny because the Peripatetic biographies are the main precursors to the *Parallel Lives*. There are two areas of potential

²⁵⁴ Boys-Stones 1997:54.

²⁵⁵ Pelling 2013:16.

²⁵⁶ Karamanolis 2014.

²⁵⁷ This point is owed to Philip Horky.

Peripatetic influence on Plutarch's method – philosophical thinking and biographical writing.

We will discuss each in turn.

As previously noted, Plutarch was capable of criticism of Peripatetic views.²⁵⁸

Nevertheless, he did not write nearly as much against the Peripatetics as he wrote against the Stoics and Epicureans, and was overall very positive toward Aristotle. As Karamanolis has shown, Plato and Aristotle were seen to be much in agreement by this period, and into late antiquity.²⁵⁹ He argues that 'the majority of Platonists in this era shared the view that Aristotle's philosophy, when understood in the right spirit, is essentially compatible with Plato's doctrine, as they interpreted it.'²⁶⁰ This affinity harkens back even earlier than Plutarch, as the first Platonist to approve of Aristotle was Antiochus of Ascalon (c. 130-68 BCE), following the closure of the skeptical period of the Academy.²⁶¹ He was familiar with Aristotle's logical system, and wrote a lecture and an eight-book series about it, besides a work against Chrysippus relating to logic, though all of these are lost.²⁶² Plutarch found a way to transform Plato's tripartite division of the soul into a bipartite division by subsuming Plato's two lower parts into the irrational soul, and by this pattern of reasoning argued that Aristotle was not far from Plato's view.²⁶³ Due the common ground of Plato and Aristotle on the basic rational-irrational division of the soul, Plutarch was able to use the *Nicomachean Ethics* of Aristotle for his account of virtue, which Karamanolis summarizes as 'an extreme of excellence (*akrotes*), which however lies in a mean, determined by reason, between two opposite emotions.'²⁶⁴ Despite being indebted to Alexandrian Platonism

²⁵⁸ Dillon 1996:186.

²⁵⁹ See Karamanolis 2006.

²⁶⁰ Karamanolis 2006:3.

²⁶¹ Karamanolis 2006:8.

²⁶² Karamanolis 2014.

²⁶³ Dillon 1996:195.

²⁶⁴ Karamanolis 2014. See Plutarch's *On Moral Virtue* 443D-444D; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1107a6-8.

through his teacher Ammonius, Plutarch goes to Aristotle for ethics.²⁶⁵ Aristotle's language of inherited nature, habits, education, virtue, moral character, and the question of the ability of nature to change are all part of Plutarch's language.²⁶⁶ Russell goes so far as to say, 'Without the [Nicomachean] *Ethics*, there would be no such thing as Plutarchan biography.'²⁶⁷ This is significant, in view of how important ethics were to Plutarch's entire philosophical and biographical program.

The influence of the Peripatetic school on the genre of biography would impact Plutarch by extension, but this influence is debated. Despite the Hellenistic biographies which many Peripatetics wrote, Momigliano did not see them as the decisive initiator of biography.²⁶⁸ He argued that if biography is not founded upon Aristotelian ethics, then it could not be Peripatetic, even if their important contribution is recognized.²⁶⁹ However, Fortenbaugh disagrees with this argument, since non-Peripatetics used Aristotelian vocabulary anyway, and even the existence of Aristotelian technical vocabulary within Peripatetic biographies would not imply a technical meaning, since they were written for a wider audience than fellow philosophers.²⁷⁰ Fortenbaugh ultimately agrees with Momigliano on biography's independence of the Peripatos, however, since many features of biography are not limited to Aristotle's ideas: interest in an individual's training and nature find precedent with Plato and Xenophon as well, and Polybius, who also discussed these issues, was not necessarily a Peripatetic.²⁷¹

²⁶⁵ Dillon 1996:195. Dillon also observes Plutarch's teacher in Athens, Ammonius, was from Egypt, representing the dogmatic strain of Platonism common to Alexandria and Athens in this period (184).

²⁶⁶ Russell 1973:105.

²⁶⁷ Russell 1973:105.

²⁶⁸ Momigliano 1993:76, 106.

²⁶⁹ Momigliano 1993:119.

²⁷⁰ Fortenbaugh 2007:49-50.

²⁷¹ Fortenbaugh 2007:60-63.

As far as Plutarch is concerned, he would be influenced by Peripatetic methods of biography because he read peripatetic biography. Plutarch made only sparse reference to them, and they are not extant, therefore it is difficult to establish the precise degree of their influence.²⁷² He read Theophrastus' *Callisthenes*, which is not extant but seems to have heavily focused upon character.²⁷³ Phanias of Eresos may be one Peripatetic source for his *Themistocles* and is cited five times, but is barely used at all for the *Solon* and *Aristides*, and there may be a Peripatetic connection with Demetrius of Phaleron and Duris of Samos, both associates of Theophrastus.²⁷⁴

Direct quotation from the biographies of the Peripatos is limited, but Scardigli has said that three compositional principles from them influenced Plutarch: the categorization of characters and possible changes to character evident in Theophrastus, the distinction between biography and history Plutarch made in *Alexander*, and the principle of comparison common in Peripatetic thought.²⁷⁵ Characterization was a Peripatetic enterprise, but Scardigli's attribution of distinction between biography and history to Peripatetics seems to assume the Peripatetic origin of the genre, which, as argued above, is not tenable. Nepos makes this generic differentiation in one of his works, but he was a Roman writer with no clear links to Peripatetic philosophy.²⁷⁶ Plutarch may have actually taken the comparison idea from Nepos, but as Hägg observes, 'Plutarch is a comparatist by inclination and habit; he works consistently, both in essays and in biographies, with juxtaposition, comparison, and contrast. If he borrowed the idea from Nepos, it was because it suited his own analogical thinking.'²⁷⁷ Indeed, comparative patterns are found not only in the *Lives*, but in the *Moralia*, such as his essays comparing atheism and superstition or

²⁷² Scardigli 1995:8.

²⁷³ Fortenbaugh 2007:56-57.

²⁷⁴ Scardigli 1995:8.

²⁷⁵ Scardigli 1995:8-11.

²⁷⁶ *Pelopidas* 1.

²⁷⁷ Hägg 2012:241-242.

fortune and skill.²⁷⁸ While Aristotelian thinking was likely influential in this regard, Plato performed serious comparative discussion as well, his exposition of the types of government being one famous example.²⁷⁹

By this account so far then, Plutarch did not benefit from actual Peripatetic biographies so much as the ideas behind them. Russell credits two Peripatetic methodological ideas for providing the structure necessary for Plutarch's biography: the systematization of ethics and the erudite collection of facts.²⁸⁰ Russell comments that the Peripatetic respect for fact, represented from their biological and socio-political research, was possibly even more essential to Plutarchan biography.²⁸¹

However, the fact-collection does bring up the opposition of antiquarianism to historiography. This has already been addressed in Chapter 1, that historians did indeed use old documents and inscriptions in their work. What separated historians and antiquarians is the matter of interpretation, in that antiquarians are seen as gathering facts, while historians seek an understanding of the facts upon collecting them.²⁸² However, which category would be appropriate for Plutarch? Payen sees Plutarch as an antiquarian 'to the extent that in both the *Lives* and *Moralia* he shows an interest in preserving cultural heritage that comprises political, religious, and moral traditions, social customs, and military conduct.'²⁸³ However, Plutarch was doing much more than this. He was not above studying chronology, as he obviously did so to write the *Lives*, but this was resorted to as a historian would, for a purpose beyond mere fact collection – to bring up divergent sources that affect the course of the narrative.²⁸⁴ Plutarch even

²⁷⁸ See *On Superstition* and *On the Fortune of Alexander*.

²⁷⁹ See *Republic* Book 7.

²⁸⁰ Russell 1973:105.

²⁸¹ Russell 1973:105.

²⁸² Robin Osborne in keynote speech at AMPAH conference, 21 March, 2015.

²⁸³ Payen 2014:237.

²⁸⁴ *Them.* 27.1, *Rom.* 3.2-3, *Thes.* 4.1.

spoke against one antiquarian strain in his disparaging of the chronographers for their contradictions regarding Solon's meeting with Croesus.²⁸⁵ There are clear literary structures to the *Lives*, narratives rather than lists or mere descriptions, as well as moral instruction. Plutarch's explicit opinions on his work show he was not only preserving, but also critically sifting evidence to include or exclude from his work, interpreting it according to ethical interests. As Scardigli observes, he was not 'a mere collector of secondary material,' but rather, committed to 'creating a work which was pleasant to read and at the same time instructive.'²⁸⁶ Collingwood had argued that scissors-and-paste style of collecting various old texts or facts and simply placing them together is not truly history; rather, history requires critical examination and inference from the evidence.²⁸⁷ This dissertation argues that Plutarch did not do mere research, but historiographically interpreted the record and retold it as narrative. However, our claim is problematized by his programmatic statement for *Alexander*, as well as the challenge stated in Chapter 1 as to how historiography can be reconciled with Plutarch's specific purposes as a biographer.

Plutarch's Idea of History and Historiographical Method

Before proceeding, three points from the previous chapter are worth recalling – that the genres of history and biography are dependent upon reader expectations, that scope is a major delineator between the two genres, and that theoretically there need not be a separation of biography from historiographic method and function of source texts. These theses will aid in interpreting this passage more clearly. Plutarch begins *Alexander* with a statement of apology, worth quoting in full:

²⁸⁵ *Solon* 27.1.

²⁸⁶ Scardigli 1995:26.

²⁸⁷ See Collingwood 1946:257-258, 269.

[...] the multitude of the deeds to be treated is so great that I shall make no other preface than to entreat my readers, in case I do not tell of all the famous actions of these men, nor even speak exhaustively at all in each particular case, but in epitome for the most part, not to complain. For it is not Histories (ιστορίας) that I am writing, but Lives (βίους); and in the most illustrious deeds there is not always a manifestation of virtue or vice, nay, a slight thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of character than battles when thousands fall, or the greatest armaments, or sieges of cities. Accordingly, just as painters get the likenesses in their portraits from the face and the expression of the eyes, wherein the character shows itself, but make very little account of the other parts of the body, so I must be permitted to devote myself rather to the signs of the soul in men, and by means of these to portray the life of each, leaving to others the description of their great contests.²⁸⁸

The *Alexander* prologue is often referenced to embody Plutarch's decisive view on history and biography, or as a universal statement on Greco-Roman ideas of the genres, but this understanding has been challenged to argue that the statement was only for this particular *Life*. Pelling denies this passage unlocks all of 'Plutarch's biographical technique.'²⁸⁹ Duff likewise cautions that it is not necessarily meant to be a universal statement about the generic distinction between history and biography, nor should it even apply to all of Plutarch's *Lives*.²⁹⁰ Duff concedes that a distinction is made 'occasionally' in ancient literature, as in Nepos' *Pelopidas*. However, in light of how few biographies have survived, it may be important to take such surviving statements seriously, because Plutarch repeated the same idea as that of Nepos from two centuries before, which may suggest other, now lost, precedents in ancient literature as well, or a common generic expectation for biography.²⁹¹ Although it may not be the key to understanding all of the *Parallel Lives*, this prologue must relate to the other *Lives* to some extent. For instance, Plutarch was definitely interested in seeking 'small things' like phrases or

²⁸⁸ *Alex.* 1.1b-3.

²⁸⁹ Pelling 2011:259.

²⁹⁰ Duff 1999:17. Duff draws attention especially to where 'history' and 'life' are used flexibly, as in Jerome's referring to Tacitus' *Annals* and *Histories* as the 'Lives of the Caesars' (19).

²⁹¹ See Momigliano 1993:12-14, 117 who takes there to have been a widespread, strict separation of history and biography, though Gentili and Cerri 1988:61-85 dispute this.

jests in other *Lives* when he could.²⁹² Nevertheless, the basic contention that the *Alexander* statement did not apply equally to all of Plutarch's work seems correct. It is relevant to other *Lives*, but an over-abundance of material for *Alexander-Caesar* was not the situation for the other *Lives*, and it is the nature of the material that made this statement necessary, as will be seen below.

Essentially, Plutarch is submitting both a positive and negative idea here. Stated positively, he is writing a 'Life', a βίος. Chapter 1 already established the development of the word and genre it represents, but it deserves brief attention here. The meaning of the term, as recalled from above, is 'a way of life', which all the more fits the episodes of everyday life that Plutarch sought to include. Duff argues that the word here has a double reference, both to the fact that these are biographies and also to an application for the lives of his audience.²⁹³ The portrait painter example serves to explain what it means to write *Lives*. Just as he shapes the life of the hero, he is also shaping the lives of his readers toward moral betterment.²⁹⁴ Plutarch elsewhere compares the historian, particularly Thucydides, to a painter in giving vivid representation of the events and the emotions of the characters.²⁹⁵ Further, if a painter is permitted to concentrate on some features and not others, his selective 'practice of looking for signs of the soul' is vindicated.²⁹⁶ He must search for, and include, details that reflect character; even if they are relatively insignificant to larger-scale history, they are valuable to the individual's character. Even so, Plutarch implied that he is tied to his sources because he is committed 'to penetrate to what reveals the soul of my subject, and through this reveal the life of each.'²⁹⁷ Information about

²⁹² Cf. *Cicero* 5.4.

²⁹³ Duff 1999:17.

²⁹⁴ Duff 1999:17.

²⁹⁵ *On the Fame of the Athenians*, 347A.

²⁹⁶ Wardman 1974:26.

²⁹⁷ Hamilton 1999:2 trans.

the ‘soul’ of the subject was to be found in historical records, information about them that already exists and requires scrutiny.

The negative idea on the other hand has to do with limitation and exclusion. He says it is not history. But history (ιστορία) has a fairly wide range of meaning. What kind of history is it not? Duff notes that the term could be used generally for narratives of any type, but suggests that here ιστορία signifies ‘large-scale’ history.²⁹⁸ Scardigli, noting Valgiglio’s study of the fluctuation of the word’s meaning, sees Plutarch as broadly exemplifying ‘a historian of ancient culture’ rather than practitioner of pragmatic history.²⁹⁹ Plutarch could easily be considered a historian of ancient culture by the function his writings serve for historians today, though it may be an anachronistic depiction rather than an accurate representation of how Plutarch saw himself. The separation from pragmatic history makes good sense here, however: he is not writing on the scale of a Ephorus, or Thucydides. Further, Plutarch’s idea of including small things in *Alexander* and *Caesar* is the opposite of Lucian’s advice in *How to Write History* – that small matters should be gone over quickly but more time ought to be spent on larger, more consequential matters.³⁰⁰ Such histories help readers seeking broader perspective, but Plutarch was a philosopher writing for the education of the reader about political individuals, their character traits and deeds.

Duff reads Plutarch as separating *Alexander-Caesar* in ‘subject-matter’ and ‘purpose’ from broader histories, that the character must be understood from a moral standpoint rather than the great actions typical of historiography.³⁰¹ However, there are two problems with this. First, Plutarch was keenly aware of Xenophon’s historical writings and the pragmatic history of

²⁹⁸ Duff 1999:17.

²⁹⁹ Scardigli 1999:27.

³⁰⁰ *How to Write History*, 56.

³⁰¹ Duff 1999:15. Duff recognizes that ancient pragmatic history can also have moral purposes, but does not explicitly impute this knowledge to Plutarch here.

Polybius, which also seek understanding from moral standpoints, as shown in the previous chapter. Moral focus is not the delineator between large-scale history and individualized biography, neither does Plutarch actually state that ethics is what divides history and biography. He merely says that great deeds do ‘not always’ (οὔτε ... πάντως) manifest virtue or vice. Second, great deeds can and do show virtue, as is clear from the many significant actions of Alexander and Caesar that Plutarch does include. The great and small things are, as Pelling observes, a ‘polarity’ which Plutarch introduces to set the stage for a diverse range of connections within the pair.³⁰²

Having established character as a boundary-marker, anything not deemed relevant to this focus is permitted to be excluded. Plutarch has given himself the authority to make interpretive and inclusive decisions regarding historical evidence. Alexander, one of the most famous Greek leaders, would already be very familiar to Plutarch’s audience, thus many of his omissions would likely have been noticed. Some *Lives* suffered from a dearth of information; this was not the case with Alexander. For this reason, Hägg asserts that this contrast was not made to distinguish between history and biography as genres, but a simple ‘excuse for summarizing or omitting historically important facts in the cases of Alexander and Caesar.’³⁰³ It was necessary that he make a statement like this to evade criticism and establish from the start what the expectation for the work should be. Pelling notes that the phrase μὴ συκοφαντεῖν which is translated ‘not to complain’ or ‘not to regard this as a fault,’ actually carries a further connotation of disingenuous criticism or ‘quibbling’, thus the statement serves to take away ground from any unsympathetic critic.³⁰⁴

³⁰² Pelling 2011:260.

³⁰³ Hägg 2012:269.

³⁰⁴ Pelling 2011:276.

Further, Plutarch would have to make a generic statement of his limited scope for the *Life* because Alexander in particular complicated historiography.³⁰⁵ History before Alexander was not so focused upon single individuals as on corporate groups or many great individuals competing against each other. Even Xenophon is not central in the *Anabasis*, and the Persian emperor in Herodotus' *Histories* is countered by a range of individuals such as Themistocles or Leonidas. Alexander on the other hand dominated this period in the historical record, as hinted at in the titles of his historians, such as the *Anabasis of Alexander* by Arrian, or the *History of Alexander* by Cleitarchus. Alexander's accomplishment was so immense from a Greek point of view³⁰⁶ that any large-scale account of the period would place him as the central historical figure, and would be lengthy compared to the conventional span of *Lives*. Thus, Plutarch needed to make a generic clarification for his reader's sake, to limit the scope of the work to Alexander himself. Additionally, Duff points out that Plutarch is engaging in a 'recusatio,' a literary form that legitimizes a work as unique from others, and serves to further honour Alexander by saying there are so many great things that were accomplished that there is no space to recount them all.³⁰⁷ As Baldwin states, 'It was simply that his current subjects were too vast to admit every detail important in the context of grand figures of Alexander and Caesar.'³⁰⁸

It seems therefore that this limitative statement serves a generic, pragmatic, and narrative function, but it does not deny that Plutarch is utilizing historiographical method. He is excluding his work from universal, exhaustive histories and focusing upon the character of a historical individual by searching through evidence. Further light is shed on Plutarch's *Lives* and history in other programmatic statements that mention this word.

³⁰⁵ Julius Caesar afterwards complicated it as well. See Pelling 2006:255-257.

³⁰⁶ Plutarch gave such a view in his rhetorical piece, *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander*.

³⁰⁷ Duff 1999:21.

³⁰⁸ Baldwin 1979:103.

In *Aemilius Paulus* 1.1, Plutarch makes a parallel of *bios* and *historia*, rather than the contrast found in *Alexander*. Plutarch writes, ‘I began the writing of my ‘Lives’ (τῶν βίων) for the sake of others, but I find that I am continuing the work and delighting in it now for my own sake also, using history (τῇ ἱστορίᾳ) as a mirror and endeavoring in a manner to fashion and adorn my life (τὸν βίον) in conformity with the virtues therein depicted.’³⁰⁹ This first sentence uses the two terms as equivalent. He goes on to say that he ‘welcomes each subject of my history as a guest’ and by his observation of them can select what was the most important and ‘beautiful’ (κάλλιστα) to know. Hägg comments regarding this passage, that history ‘is no opposite to biography, but rather the substance that makes up the Lives.’³¹⁰ The process described in the *Aemilius* prologue is historiographical and philosophical.³¹¹ Plutarch is writing about the way of life of individuals in history, and by a sort of interaction with them through his studies, both improves his own life and finds what is worthy of inclusion within the written product for the improvement of his reader’s lives. The picture of the mirror is frequently used elsewhere in Plutarch’s works and Greek literature to illustrate anything that symbolizes what is good in reality.³¹² Mirrors can also represent the bad, and here it likely challenges to readers to take their own initiative in assessing admirable or worthless examples.³¹³ The ‘mirror’ is equated with the lives of the men which are mediated through his historical sources, and also with the finished *Life* that is available to the readers.

The rapprochement of the past and present, text and life, was Plutarch’s attempt to show the value of his writing, and reveals an assertion of his historiographical method, besides an invitation to anyone in his audience to frame their own lives upon the lives of these virtuous

³⁰⁹ *Aemilius Paullus* 1.1.

³¹⁰ Hägg 2012:272.

³¹¹ *Aemilius Paullus* 1.1-5.

³¹² Duff 1999:33.

³¹³ See Zadorojnyi 2010:169-195.

heroes.³¹⁴ Duff notes that Plutarch on some occasions, as in this one, refers to his work as history, in the double sense of both the enquiry into the past and the events of the past.³¹⁵

Another case of Plutarch stating his work as history seems to be *Theseus*. Plutarch writes that his history, or research, on Lycurgus and Numa had brought him near to the times of Theseus and Romulus, and by purifying myth he hoped to take on a ‘semblance of history’ (ιστορίας ὄψιν), adding that not everything included will be plausible, requiring the patience of his audience for old stories.³¹⁶ There is a further implication here that his other *Lives* are history, by virtue of his statement of the unique situation of this pair. In other words, this pair will have to merely *seem* like history, unlike the other *Lives* which, by inference, *are* history. Therefore, it is evident that Plutarch considered his works to be historical, and in some sense, history, though it is the history of one person’s life rather than sweeping multi-book narratives on the level of the pragmatic historians. A *Life* is the history of one person.

However, Plutarch’s narrative style has some affinity to tragedy, which brings up the question of whether Plutarch engaged in rhetorical ‘tragic history.’ For instance, tragic technique is borrowed for the narrative of Crassus at Carrhae, and used to give a portrayal of the character of Crassus.³¹⁷ However, there are various points where Plutarch seems to avoid tragic effects. He may add academic parenthesis or a moralizing speech at an odd point in the narrative. For example, in the climactic event of announcement of liberty for the Greeks, he follows it with an excursus on the possibility of the ravens falling out of the sky from the loud cheering.³¹⁸ He also liked to avoid tragic endings, trying to include some positive or moralist statement at the death of

³¹⁴ Duff 1999:33.

³¹⁵ Duff 1999:33.

³¹⁶ *Thes.* 1. Plutarch was not alone in rationalizing myth. See Wiseman 2011:319-322.

³¹⁷ So argues Braund 1993:468-474.

³¹⁸ *Flam.* 10. This does not mean Plutarch is deliberately avoiding tragedy, though it is possible. Barrow 1967:63 suggests such distractions are narrative techniques to delay action and thereby prolong the suspense, or to further didactic aims by implanting important information while the pupils are alert and attentive to the speaker.

the hero.³¹⁹ Plutarch speaks dismissively of tragedy in some of his works as frivolous and unreal,³²⁰ voices his dislike of so-called ‘tragic history’ that tries to affect the reader’s emotions with fictionalized accounts, and strongly criticizes those he believes to be tragic historians.³²¹ Plutarch saw the past as filled with great models for imitation, but strongly opposes any interpretation of the past where their true worth is minimized.³²² Plutarch criticizes Herodotus for suppressing the truth about Greek greatness by neglecting to mention their acts of bravery and making barbarians seem greater than Greeks.³²³ Recent scholarship has questioned the category of tragic historians itself, making it an unhelpful distinction to place upon Plutarch.³²⁴

Our findings so far are consistent with the theoretical framework set up in Chapter 1, that the author’s parameters and reader expectations frame the genre of individual works. Plutarch’s *Lives* are not universal histories, but biographies with historical content, as we see from Plutarch’s sense of *historia* as enquiry and narration of the past. This means they are liable both to historiographical method and to a philosophy of history.

Plutarch’s method is multifaceted and will be further revealed in examining *Pericles* and *Nicias* below, but there are three aspects of his stated methods worth noting at this point. First, Plutarch portrays his *Lives* as enquiring into historical facts. He explicitly makes his apology in *Life of Theseus* because dealing with more mythical evidence that may not have happened is an exception to the rule.³²⁵ Even so, he dismisses some accounts of Romulus’ birth as ‘utterly mythical’ and approves of opposing accounts supported by Fabius Pictor and Diocles as they are

³¹⁹ See Pelling 2011:371.

³²⁰ Wardman 1974:169-171.

³²¹ Wardman 1974:172.

³²² 855D-E.

³²³ 857A-C.

³²⁴ See Walbank 1960:216-234, Marincola 2003, and Marincola 2013.

³²⁵ *Thes.* 1.

more reliable.³²⁶ He also notes the problem of contradictory historians in *Lycurgus*, as well as stating his effort to choose ‘authors who are least contradicted, or who have the most notable witnesses (μάρτυρας) for what they have written about the man.’³²⁷ Records of events with a higher likelihood of occurrence seem to be his goal.

Near the end of his fairly lengthy introduction to *Cimon-Lucullus* Plutarch states a serious concern for historical truth. Plutarch tells the story how the Orchomenians gave a bad report on the city of Chaeronea on the murder of some Roman soldiers, and Lucullus wrote testimony telling the truth that the city was not to blame, delivering them all from punishment. He continues that since they still owe Lucullus for his truthful testimony (remembering that Plutarch was Chaeronean himself), he will narrate the character and disposition of his life truly, and states, ‘as a return for his truthful testimony (ἀληθοῦς δὲ μαρτυρίας) he himself surely would not deign to accept a false (ψευδῆ) and garbled narrative of his career.’³²⁸ Plutarch compares truthful court testimony with his own research and biographic account, and the implication that he owes him the existence of his beloved hometown makes the comparison all the more powerful. It is not surprising that Lucullus’ deliverance of Chaeronea would be included by Plutarch, but it could have been taken to stress the necessity to recount his virtue or how appropriate it would be for himself as Chaeronean to write about him, or other directions besides articulating a solemn need to relate truthful facts. Any study of the past meant discovering the truth, and he faults any historian who failed to do this, especially if falsified deliberately (his polemic against Herodotus being a notable example).³²⁹

³²⁶ *Rom.* 2-3.

³²⁷ *Lycurgus* 1.

³²⁸ *Cimon* 2.

³²⁹ See *On the Malice of Herodotus* especially 854E-F and 870B.

The second aspect of his method is the focus upon the individual, the components of character in his historical interpretations. We have already seen that Plutarch combined ethics and history, and that the defining aspect of the *Lives* is the focus upon a single character in turn. However, what is involved in character, and what makes individual character important in history? Plutarch saw character (*ethos*) as based on nature (*physis*), in that a person's nature can be educated so as to inform their character either towards virtue or vice.³³⁰ The education of an individual begins in childhood, but childhood can also reveal prior nature. In *Dinner of the Seven Wise Men*, Plutarch presents Thales to comment on the strange nature (φύσει) of Alexidemus, and proceeds to tell a story from Alexidemus' youth to demonstrate.³³¹ These principles allow childhood stories into the *Lives* as part of history, since while the episodes may be relatively insignificant, they reveal more about that individual.³³²

Plutarch's major aim in writing about his selected heroes is to show examples of virtue, those who have done fine things, and have done these things by reasoned choice (*proairesis*).³³³ Humans make morally responsible choices to do an action when it is done freely and rationally, as opposed to being forced or stemming from fits of passion.³³⁴ Plutarch saw the human soul as 'essentially non-rational and yet receptive of reason that stems from the intellect,' and used this division of the soul to explain human agency, as an interaction between these two parts.³³⁵ When this rational part of the soul interacts with emotion in a positive way, virtue (*arete*) is produced, but when emotions gain power over reason, it yields vice.³³⁶ Plutarch could use his Platonic psychology concerning parts of the soul to heighten understanding and exemplarity of historical

³³⁰ Karamanolis 2014.

³³¹ 149B.

³³² Cf. *Alcibiades* 2 and *Cato Minor* 2.

³³³ Wardman 1974:107-116.

³³⁴ Wardman 1974:113-114.

³³⁵ Karamanolis 2014. Cf. Brenk 1998:28-49.

³³⁶ See Karamanolis 2014, *Moralia* 443.

figures.³³⁷ Plutarch's idea of human character was also influenced from *Nicomachean Ethics*, where, as Harris explains, 'in defining moral virtue Aristotle began with natural impulses present in all men, which by means of repeated actions (πραξις) develop into a fixed moral disposition (ἥξις.) Hence the stress in all Peripatetic biography on actions as the key to character; historical study from this angle was an integral part of the young politician's training.'³³⁸

Aristotle and later Peripatetic tradition with which Plutarch was familiar recognized static character types, such as presented in Theophrastus' work *Characters*. Other Peripatetics created portraits of character in a similar way: Lycon wrote about drunkards, and Philodemus includes a series of character-sketches in a work, *On Relief from Arrogance*, though we are not sure of their original form.³³⁹ Character types will be important for his interpretations of history, as our analysis of Nicias will show. Gill has articulated a difference between ancient concepts of 'character' which show more fixed conceptions of moral nature and 'personality' which identifies more special or unique traits of an individual, yet sees Plutarch as going along with the former conception.³⁴⁰ However, even character types present a problem for historical research. Different sources may describe the actions of the individual yet not fit together to give a completely consistent picture of character. Plutarch may answer such incongruities in two ways. The issue may lie with a biased or inaccurate source, which Plutarch is often willing to point out.³⁴¹ Plutarch may also surmise that the person's character actually changed.

Plutarch recognized that changes in character were possible, and dealt with this problem in his research. Character change could be from bad to good, or good to bad. Anyone changing from good to bad is a problem for Plutarch, stemming from his Platonic sensibilities. On

³³⁷ Pelling 2011:344-46 examines Plutarch's analysis of the 'spirited' Coriolanus from this perspective.

³³⁸ Harris 1970:186.

³³⁹ Diggle 2004:9-10.

³⁴⁰ Gill 1983:469-487. See also Gill 1990:1-31.

³⁴¹ *Lycurgus* 28, *Cato Minor* 52.4-5.

Sertorius' poor treatment of hostages near the end of his life, Plutarch wonders if he concealed a cruel nature under a mild façade for political expediency, because he could 'not think that any external accident could ever make virtue, when it is pure and in accordance with reason, move to its opposite.'³⁴² The good young Philip V turning into a sensual and cruel tyrant is explained thus: 'this was not really a change in nature, but a disclosure, when he was no longer afraid, of a badness that for a long time had not been acknowledged through fear.'³⁴³ Moving from bad to good is easier, and fit well within Plutarch's intellectual framework, having written an essay on progress in virtue.³⁴⁴ Pelling has pointed out that Plutarch did have the capacity to recognize the uniqueness of an individual and move toward the 'personality' side of Gill's spectrum.³⁴⁵ It is outside our purposes here to discuss which of these Plutarch identified with the most, but it will be discussed at points relative to his historical research in the next chapters. In any case, the individual becomes the locus of interpretation. This is what makes Plutarch a biographer, but it can also be seen as a type of historiographical method, except parameterized into the narrow focus of a single hero in his context.

A third aspect of his method is his idea that history reveals truths about the world that educate the reader. History is didactic, mostly in the sense of studying the character and actions of historical individuals and to gain insight from the process and learn moral facts. *On Making Progress in Virtue* goes so far as to treat history (and poetry) as complementary to philosophy in educating one's character. History should be searched to find what is valuable in informing one's own character and to check emotions.³⁴⁶ Since he says this as a philosopher, this shows a high

³⁴² *Sertorius* 10.5.

³⁴³ *Aratas* 51.4.

³⁴⁴ Wardman 1973:135.

³⁴⁵ Pelling 2011:283-338.

³⁴⁶ 79B-D.

regard for the value of history in informing how to live the good life.³⁴⁷ Plutarch sees history as teaching philosophical facts, and this is evident in the *Lives*, such as his presentation of Coriolanus's life to illustrate his philosophy of anger.³⁴⁸ History can also teach political facts, an especially important function in light of Plutarch's hopes to encourage statesmen. For instance, Plutarch has a simple model of political realities, such as the 'aristocracy versus people' tension that emerges throughout the *Lives*.³⁴⁹ Pelling has shown that this moralist interest influences his historical explanation, leading him to see episodes as having a timeless, imminent quality rather than a one-off event.³⁵⁰ Plutarch believed history follows sets of principles, a view also found in other ancient historians.³⁵¹ Studying the past for Plutarch is very much the same thing as studying characters, except that a piece dedicated to one individual has a more narrowed focus than the wider story.

These insights into his historiographical method bring us to a basic understanding of Plutarch's idea of history. It is to be truthful, didactic, and based on the actions of great men. His idea of history is further elucidated in his general attitude toward history. Plutarch was a traditionalist. He maintained a strong respect for the past, as seen in his historical statements and even in his philosophy. His philosophy was settled in Plato and Aristotle, the old philosophical traditions, while opposing the relatively newer traditions of the Epicureans and Stoics.³⁵² Further, his respectful disagreement with the Stoics and complete rejection of the Epicureans is interesting in light of the Stoics being more similar to Platonism and Aristotelianism than the

³⁴⁷ Hadot 2004's argument that philosophy was primarily a way of life brings history to greater importance if it can teach the inquirer how to live.

³⁴⁸ Duff 1999:87-89.

³⁴⁹ Pelling 2011:211-217.

³⁵⁰ Pelling 2011:246.

³⁵¹ See Thuc. 1.22.4, Polybius' *Histories* 6.9-10.

³⁵² The Stoics and Epicureans attacked Plato, which is one reason why Plutarch was so interested in refuting them, as well as correcting the mistaken interpretations of Plato on which their own philosophies were built. See Karamanolis 2014.

Epicureans, who repudiated all philosophy before Epicurus.³⁵³ All of this reflects Plutarch's traditionalism, and we may expect him to relate to his sources accordingly, and with a great deal of care. His essay *On the Glory of Athens* presents an idea of his love for the Greek past. His respect for the virtue of the Roman past is demonstrated in the very project of writing parallel *Lives*, and his accolades for Roman figures is not restricted. However, his affinity towards the concept of Greek liberty also implies admiration of the days when Greece was free, however much he may have appreciated the Romans.³⁵⁴ Duff writes, 'For Plutarch, the past provides a protected space, shielded from the unpleasant realities of Greek political weakness, a space where Roman history might be appropriated into a Greek world-view and Greek culture championed freely.'³⁵⁵ The greatness of classical Greece was not meaningless now that it served Rome, however, because Plutarch's high view of the past also meant that the past has things to teach those living in the present. The past is composed of individual characters doing deeds, and it is those great individuals doing fine actions that have something in particular to teach, and their character is worthy of study. The *Lives* came out of this philosophy of history.

Having laid out Plutarch's method and idea of history, was he successful? As has been mentioned previously, Plutarch has gained some respect from many scholars for his historical acumen. Badian argues that 'Plutarch, when he set his mind to it, could be a critical historian superior to many of the professedly historical writers.'³⁵⁶ In his study of several cases in Plutarch's *Alexander*, he shows that Plutarch was aware that many of the stories he shared were dubious and would tag some of them with some marker to indicate this, such as 'it is said' (using

³⁵³ Karamanolis 2014.

³⁵⁴ See *Flam.* 11-12.

³⁵⁵ Duff 1999:291.

³⁵⁶ Badian 2003:44.

some form of *lego* or *esti logos*) or *dokei*.³⁵⁷ Plutarch either follows a consensus of authors or weighs a trustworthy author such as Aristobulus as a criterion for inclusion of material, and even ‘expresses disbelief or doubt regarding anecdotes or sources he quotes introduced to enliven the narrative.’³⁵⁸ Furthermore, Plutarch's omission of what other authors claimed belays critical reasons for exclusion.³⁵⁹ Pelling has likewise argued for Plutarch’s concern for truth, and even the use of inscriptions and comic poets as sources shows his nearness to modern historiography.³⁶⁰ Plutarch had the capacity to be careful and detailed. He organized his *Sayings of Kings and Commanders* in careful chronological order, displaying ‘a conscientious effort to present his subject matter as exhaustively as possible’ as Payen comments.³⁶¹

Pelling and Wardman note shifts in Plutarch’s methodology depending on the sources he had available, which implies Plutarch’s faithfulness to the integrity of the historical record. Wardman, already noting Plutarch’s restricting mechanism to display ‘small’ points of character in *Alexander—Caesar*, also observes that the dependence on single historians who already covered the important points, such as Thucydides for *Nicias* and Xenophon for *Artaxerxes*, forced Plutarch to ‘amplify and produce variants.’³⁶² In *Artaxerxes*, he included a more unbelievable account by Ctesias on the death of Cyrus, though he shows his suspicion of the story by making fun of Ctesias.³⁶³ Pelling observes that for several of his *Lives*, there are pronounced gaps in his sources, yet Plutarch deliberately avoids fabricating material to close the gaps, leaving some of the *Lives* ‘veritable string vests, more hole than substance,’ as in the cases

³⁵⁷ Badian 2003:28-29.

³⁵⁸ Badian 2003:32-33.

³⁵⁹ Badian 2003:34-43.

³⁶⁰ Pelling 2011:147-128.

³⁶¹ Payen 2014:238.

³⁶² Wardman 1974:159.

³⁶³ Wardman 1974:158.

of *Phocion*, *Aristides*, and *Crassus*.³⁶⁴ In *Nicias* he attempted to bring in other evidence besides Thucydides, such as an epigram from Euripides to show the bravery of Nicias and his men, though it was a struggle to scratch this meager evidence together.³⁶⁵ In cases where there were no childhood stories, as was the case for many of the characters, he allows the absences to remain in his work, avoiding any place for fiction.³⁶⁶ While Plutarch's efforts may not always be the most effective by our standards, this shows a level of dedication to his sources.

However, there are problems found in Plutarch's historical efforts as well. Badian quoted above noted Plutarch's critical historiography 'when he set his mind to it' and Pelling 'when he wants to be' as there are other instances where his critical guard seems to lower.³⁶⁷ Bosworth's study into the parallel biographies of Eumenes and Sertorius argues that Plutarch bended the facts to create more parallels between the men, leaving him skeptical of Plutarch, as he writes:

The general conclusions to be drawn are somewhat dispiriting for the historian. Plutarch's preoccupations, as one would expect, are moral and artistic. What he is looking for is a neat, consistent interpretation of character that makes for satisfying comparison and contrast with the parallel *Life*. Material is selected as it proves appropriate for the model and important episodes are discarded without scruple if they have no obvious illustrative value. Oversimplification is the norm. [...] In isolation Plutarch is dangerously misleading. It is not merely that he is writing biography, not history. He is writing *parallel* biographies, and there is an additional element of distortion. The material is not merely subsumed to a view of character: the view itself is artificial, determined by the need for similarity and contrast.³⁶⁸

De Romilly also sees distortions in Plutarch's use of Thucydides, which will be heavily discussed in the next chapter.³⁶⁹ As noted above, Plutarch's ideology was indeed comparatist in general, but this does not necessarily equate to distortion of history, even if comparison is susceptible to distortion. Rather ethical comparison is one set of questions that could, in theory,

³⁶⁴ Pelling 2011:153.

³⁶⁵ Wardman 1974:157.

³⁶⁶ Pelling 2011:153.

³⁶⁷ Pelling 2011:148. See also Wardman 1974:1-48.

³⁶⁸ Bosworth 1992:79.

³⁶⁹ De Romilly 1988:22-34.

be historiographical. Comparison and contrast did involve critical thinking on Plutarch's part. Some comparisons would have been obvious, as the case of *Alexander-Caesar*, which includes that Caesar read about the life of Alexander and took inspiration from him.³⁷⁰ At other times the comparison is not immediately apparent – he may choose one individual first, then think of someone from the other nation who is comparable, as he did for Lucullus and Cimon.³⁷¹ It is also not surprising that Plutarch, like any ancient author, would use and perhaps misuse rhetoric. As Bowen states, it was 'the staple of ancient education' but adds conversely that Plutarch was also among the 'Platonists who mistrusted rhetoric.'³⁷² However, the relaxing of his method is still a concern, and these criticisms bring up many interesting questions. Is omission, rhetorical strategy, and moral agenda paramount to historical distortion, or are they actually one historical perspective informed by Plutarch's philosophy? Was Plutarch interested in what really happened, as he says? Did he let his critical method lapse or take historiographical care only when it suited him?

These questions are important, because in explaining the methods or thought of any ancient author, there should be an attempt to understand it as simply and consistently as possible. Viewing Plutarch's *Lives* as literary and ideologically motivated distortions of history runs against what we have seen of Plutarch's concern for getting the past right. There should be some attempt at least to explain the author consistently. Wright notes this principle in stating, 'Any hypothesis which can display an overall consistency of thought, provided that the data are retained and enhanced, and provided that there is at least the promise of coherence with wider fields of study, will always be preferable to one which leaves the writer as a scatty individual,

³⁷⁰ *Caesar* 11.5.

³⁷¹ *Cimon* 3.1.

³⁷² Bowen 1992:1.

chopping and changing his mind at every turn.’³⁷³ The next chapter will be an attempt to do this, and include passages where Plutarch may initially seem to not have exercised historiographical care, and posit solutions toward his consistency. Recalling Fischer’s understanding of a historian, one who asks questions about the past and answers them with facts interpreted in the form of an explanatory paradigm,³⁷⁴ we must give special attention to his problematic usages of Thucydides, and the way in which a Plutarchan historiographical method could explain them. Having constructed Plutarch’s intellectual background, the stage is now set to analyse Plutarch’s use of Thucydides as a source in for his biographies of Pericles and Nicias, what was preserved and what was changed, and how his interpretive reasoning relates to his model of writing.

³⁷³ Wright 1997:108.

³⁷⁴ Fischer 1971:xv.

CHAPTER 3: Thucydides in Plutarch's *Life of Pericles*

Our study of Pericles and Nicias will focus on general ideas pulled from Thucydides, and specific passages from Thucydides which Plutarch worked from, and show how historiographical thinking and interpretation can account for his authorial choices. In comparing Plutarch's use of Thucydides in these cases, we will attempt to answer two sides of this question. First, what does Plutarch share with Thucydides, or in what ways does his account agree with that of Thucydides as a historical source? The second question will look more carefully at the text, and especially examine the divergences. Are the changes made arbitrarily, or can these be logical choices, choices that could be explained by historical reasoning? Historical reasoning will be defined here more simply as using a worldview to determine what happened in the past. For a biographer, this surrounds the character, deeds, and words of a single person within their historical context. 'Historical reasoning' then for Plutarch has to do with his philosophy – ethics, political paradigms, his respect for the classical authorities, his critical skepticism informed by Platonism, and religious belief.

For *Pericles*, we will embark on a study through the whole book looking for gleanings from Thucydides, mainly depending on Helmbold and O'Neil's collections of Plutarch's quotations from Thucydides.³⁷⁵ After a discussion on Plutarch and Thucydides, we will argue that they share the same essential picture of the historical Pericles, and that Plutarch sought to collect a wide variety of sources together to come to the same conclusion as Thucydides on Pericles' character.

³⁷⁵ Quotations listed from Thucydides for the *Pericles* are found in Helmbold and O'Neil 1959:71-72.

Plutarch and Thucydides

Thucydides does not provide as much material for Pericles as for Nicias, but Plutarch used a wide variety of other authors to construct the *Life*. Besides inscriptions, he mentions twenty other authors by name, including philosophers, historians, and comic poets.³⁷⁶ For chapters 3-21 of this *Life*, he appears not to have had a main core source before him, but by chapter 22 he is able to use Thucydides as his base text, using it for the overall narrative structure of the rest of the work.³⁷⁷ Pelling has argued that the manual method of writing history for the ancients was to have one main source scroll in front of the writer for any given section, with supplements added in the process obtained from memory of previous research, or from another supplementary notebook.³⁷⁸ Stadter questions whether Plutarch had the text of Thucydides before him, as Plutarch already knew Thucydides well and the error about the eclipse suggests he was working from memory.³⁷⁹

The eclipse will be addressed below, but there is good reason to think that Plutarch had Thucydides in front of him. First, with the general ancient concern to be distinctive from predecessors, Plutarch may have needed to directly reference Thucydides to ensure that he did not copy him, and as we will see below, there are many points where Plutarch seems to deliberately attempt to use synonyms and slightly different language from the same passage in Thucydides. Second, Thucydides' *History* as a whole was a dense text and not easy even for Hellenistic writers to understand, as the studies from Dionysius of Halicarnassus show.³⁸⁰ This is not the sort of text that would be easy to remember details from, and our study will observe minute details that Plutarch included. This chapter will assume therefore that Plutarch had

³⁷⁶ See *Per.* 13.9, 21.2.

³⁷⁷ Stadter 1989:xlvi-xlviii.

³⁷⁸ Pelling 2011:20-25. Cf. Barrow 1967:153.

³⁷⁹ Stadter 1989:xlvi.

³⁸⁰ See Grube 1950. Dionysius even commented that no one understood everything in Thucydides.

Thucydides in front of him, though the arguments regarding Plutarch's historical reasoning will remain viable even if not.

Before proceeding, however, a note is necessary on Plutarch's relationship with Thucydides' work. Thucydides was loathe to give biographical details, though he did give them whenever it was part of the larger story or when he discussed individuals of the previous generation because no one had done so.³⁸¹ This brings a challenge to Plutarch's task because he is trying to extract certain information from a text which does not precisely share the same interests and questions that he does. If Plutarch was using historiographical method, he would have to read between the lines and make inferences based upon the information he is given, passed through his philosophy of ethics, character, politics, and events.

Plutarch did hold Thucydides in high regard, as is evident from many positive statements concerning his work.³⁸² In his *Malice of Herodotus*, he frequently upholds Thucydides as an exemplification of a good witness with his fairer treatment of controversial people like Kleon, Nicias, and Hyperbolus.³⁸³ In *Themistocles*, Plutarch cites Thucydides as an authority against a claim by Stesimbrotus,³⁸⁴ and later on presents the conflicting reports of historians on whether Themistocles had audience with Xerxes or his son Artaxerxes, in which Plutarch takes the Artaxerxes position by reason of the value of Thucydides according with the 'chronological data.'³⁸⁵ As mentioned above, Plutarch had a high regard for tradition, and it seems Thucydides was allowed into Plutarch's circle of authorities. Furthermore, the political theory found in Thucydides has some affinity to Plato, and would resonate with the Platonist Plutarch as well.³⁸⁶

³⁸¹ Momigliano 1993:34.

³⁸² *Nic.* 1, 855F.

³⁸³ 855B-C.

³⁸⁴ *Them.* 24.5-25.2.

³⁸⁵ *Them.* 27.1.

³⁸⁶ Hornblower 1987:121.

Therefore, we have good reason to think Plutarch considers Thucydides fairly reliable on what happened and would be inclined to take Thucydides at his word.

Solving conflicting sources from Thucydides: Pericles' character development

Stadter posits three aims of Plutarch for the *Pericles*: 'to demonstrate through a presentation of his actions that Pericles in fact possessed and exercised the virtues of *praotes* and *dikaiosyne*, to refute those who hold the contrary opinion, and to lead the reader to make a decision to put these virtues into practice in his own life.'³⁸⁷ These goals all revolve around the person of Pericles. Accordingly, Plutarch gleaned aspects of the sources pertinent to Pericles' character, straining out what is less relevant to this one determining question. For this reason, an obvious place to begin in discussing Plutarch's use of Thucydides concerns what representations of Pericles are shared. To what extent did Plutarch replicate the picture of character found in Thucydides, and beyond this, what did he infer from his evidence? It is clear from a cursory reading of the *Life* that Plutarch considered Pericles a good statesman, but how does Thucydides' text relate to his assessment?

Pericles is characterized by alternating vignettes between Pericles' character and the broader context in which he operated. This broader context was provided by Thucydides. It begins with a lengthy and eloquent introduction that includes themes common throughout the *Lives*.³⁸⁸ Plutarch told an anecdote of Caesar jesting at the expense of those who spend their natural human affections on animals rather than on fellow human beings, thereby introducing the concept of wasting senses on unworthy objects, and the necessity to spend the human nature's desire to learn and know on worthy objects, namely, virtuous deeds.³⁸⁹ He then proceeds to give a description of Pericles' family and appearance, and his relationship with sophists and

³⁸⁷ Stadter 1989:xxx.

³⁸⁸ *Per.* 1-2.

³⁸⁹ The echoes of Aristotle's thought are interesting here.

philosophers such as Anaxagoras and Zeno the Eleatic.³⁹⁰ This is to be expected from Plutarch, as Plato's political writings held that the state should be ruled by philosophy, and this is reflected in Plutarch's frequent collapsing of philosophy and statesmanship together (outlined in Chapter 2). Plutarch could not imagine a good statesman who was not near to philosophy. Plutarch especially highlighted his relationship with Anaxagoras, that Pericles admired him and learned philosophy, which influenced him to be solemn, reserved, scientific rather than superstitious, and stirred in him an eagerness to gain a reputation for himself.³⁹¹ From here there is an account of how Pericles reluctantly began his political career, and the habits and rhetorical skill he developed to gain the respect and awe of the people.³⁹² For these specifics Plutarch so far relies on other sources besides Thucydides.³⁹³

The first mention of the historian Thucydides occurs in chapter 9, when Plutarch raises the crucial problem his sources present to him – the character of the politically active Pericles. He directly quotes Thucydides 2.65.9, which says Athens was a democracy in name but really a government by the rule of its first citizen. This same passage from Thucydides also states that Pericles led the people rather than him being led by them, and he did not hold power from wrong motives or flattery. A dilemma presents itself: Thucydides' assertions in 2.65 are that Pericles controlled the people well, but Plato represents Pericles as overindulging them.³⁹⁴ Both sources are highly respected – Thucydides one of the best historians, and the 'divine Plato' who stands at the head of his entire philosophy. Here Plutarch's critical ability conflicts with his sympathy with the authorities and Pericles on an unavoidable character question in history. His ingenious

³⁹⁰ *Per.* 3-7. However, Pericles' actual affinity with intellectuals has been questioned. See Stadter 1991:111-124.

³⁹¹ *Per.* 4-6.

³⁹² *Per.* 7-8.

³⁹³ For a survey of all of the sources for Pericles, see Stadter 1989:lviii-lxxxv.

³⁹⁴ Stadter 1989:110.

solution is to posit what de Romilly terms a ‘psychological evolution,’³⁹⁵ stating that he will examine the cause of this change in him (διὰ τῶν πραγμάτων αὐτῶν ἡ αἰτία τῆς μεταβολῆς).³⁹⁶ Pericles’ character will be subject to historical development and causation. From here until chapter 15 his focus is how Pericles moved from being a flattering demagogue to the strong statesman Thucydides described.

Plutarch proceeds to wade through non-Thucydidean material in order to obtain the picture of Pericles’ character that Thucydides provided. An important political model for Plutarch was the tension between the demos and the aristocracy,³⁹⁷ and he evidently saw this at work in Athens. Knowing that others of the aristocracy were wealthy and already firmly established, Pericles threw himself in with the people and opposed the famous leader of the aristocrats, the much-loved Cimon, and procured his ostracism. This was no small feat, but as Plutarch explains, so great ‘was the power of Pericles among the people.’³⁹⁸ Pericles’ political prowess is shown not only in Cimon’s ostracism, but also in his compatriots preventing the banished Cimon from participating in a battle against the Spartans, and initiating the recall of Cimon when he gauged that the people wanted him back.³⁹⁹ At this point, Pericles is already recognized by the Athenian aristocrats as the greatest citizen (ἤδη τὸν Περικλέα καὶ πρόσθεν ὁρῶντες γεγονότα τῶν πολιτῶν), but they attempt another effort to blunt his power in supporting of Thucydides of Alopece against him.⁴⁰⁰ Plutarch explicitly constructs this as a battle between the many and the few, and explains this is how Pericles became a pleaser of the people. He had to maintain his power base, with the added benefit of increasing Athenian power by building new settlements and giving the people something to occupy and enrich themselves. He also focuses

³⁹⁵ De Romilly 1988:23.

³⁹⁶ *Per.* 9.1.

³⁹⁷ For this polarity and its Greek origin, see Pelling 2011:217-222.

³⁹⁸ *Per.* 9.4.

³⁹⁹ *Per.* 10.

⁴⁰⁰ *Per.* 11.1 A different Thucydides from the historian.

on the public works as initiated by Pericles amid criticism from his opponents, yet eventually he succeeded in winning an ostracism vote against Thucydides of Alopece.⁴⁰¹ Plutarch recognizes further negative opinions and accusations against Pericles in the record, but protests that the passage of time makes it difficult to find the truth of the matter by research.⁴⁰² In any case, with Pericles' triumph over his last organized opposition, he held complete sway over Athens and everything under its control, from tribute funds to dynastic alliances, yet 'he was no longer the same man as before' and did not spoil the people as previously.⁴⁰³ Nevertheless, by the end of this section Plutarch is able to present the conclusion of Pericles as transcending the demos-aristocrat power differential and becoming the leader of Athens.

The final picture of Pericles agrees with Thucydides' overall assessment of Pericles, even beyond the single sentence from 2.65.9. Thucydides speaks at length about Pericles in that same section, asserting that Pericles could manage the people well. The people respected him for his superiority to bribes, his distinction, and ability, and their respect was high enough for them to accept chastisement from him, and listen to him when he encouraged their confidence. Thucydides also argued that Pericles was simply right by how later events turned out – both on his war strategy and on the strength of Athens. The former is argued from the early success of this tactic, plague notwithstanding, and how leaving the Periclean strategy cost Athens in the war. Thucydides took the post-Pericles Athenian failures to show the latter, that Athens survived for years using the wrong tactics against overwhelming enemy forces because of their residual strength.

⁴⁰¹ *Per.* 12-14.

⁴⁰² *Per.* 13.12.

⁴⁰³ *Per.* 16.

Plutarch voices his agreement with Thucydides, showing how Thucydides' record explicitly, and the comic poets' satires implicitly, show the power of Pericles.⁴⁰⁴ Plutarch likewise painted a positive picture of Pericles' tactic for defeating Sparta in chapters 33-34 (more on this below). Plutarch does not dwell upon Pericles' correct assessment of the strength of Athens as Thucydides did, but he indicates that Athens was strong under Pericles' leadership. Plutarch's concern was Pericles' solitary importance to the city's success rather than the Peloponnesian War after Pericles here, thus leaving this out could be seen as an expected decision for a biography.⁴⁰⁵ Plutarch agreed with Thucydides on his reputation and refusal of bribes, but de Romilly observes that Plutarch left out the word judgment (*gnome*) from Thucydides, instead going 'his own way, in other directions.'⁴⁰⁶ This is a key term for Thucydides, signifying one of the most important qualities of a statesman, therefore it may seem odd for it to be left out.⁴⁰⁷ However, Plutarch does use the term to describe Pericles later on in chapter 33, which will be examined below. But if any ancient writer was to maintain the distinctiveness of their work, the use of a source historiographically would not require the repetition of its technical terms.

Plutarch conveys the same 'good judgment' idea as Thucydides through his own vocabulary, giving equivalent ideas in chapter 15, except in a more picturesque fashion. He elaborates Pericles' aristocratic and kingly statesmanship (ἀριστοκρατικὴν καὶ βασιλικὴν ἐντεινόμενος πολιτείαν), and that he taught, or instructed the people (διδάσκων τὸν δῆμον).⁴⁰⁸ Duff notes that the reference to aristocratic leadership harkens back to both Plato and Aristotle in

⁴⁰⁴ *Per.* 16.1.

⁴⁰⁵ See *Per.* 15 and 39.

⁴⁰⁶ De Romilly 1988:24.

⁴⁰⁷ De Romilly 1988:24.

⁴⁰⁸ *Per.* 15.2-3.

describing the rule of the best men, regardless of the precise form of government.⁴⁰⁹ Pericles, being both a philosopher and a statesman according to Plutarch's understanding, is inevitably a teacher, and it is the philosopher Anaxagoras who inspired Pericles most to an urge for distinction (τὸ ἀξίωμα) in the first place earlier in chapter 4. Pericles is presented as knowing the correct action to take at the right time with the people, and cared for them either gently or strongly like a wise physician (ἀτεχνῶς ἰατρὸν).⁴¹⁰ That Pericles had keen abilities and good judgment is evident then from this passage, even if he does not replicate the technical term from Thucydides. Thus de Romilly's 'other directions' within Plutarch's picture is still consistent with Thucydides' view.

De Romilly sees a contrast in the specific meaning between Thucydides 1.65 and Plutarch here, in that Thucydides was doing abstract political analysis; therefore, 'democracy in name, but in fact the rule of the first citizen' is a statement about politics for Thucydides, yet a statement about Pericles for Plutarch.⁴¹¹ Thucydides and Plutarch were indeed at cross-purposes for an atomized meaning for this sentence, but it cannot be said that Thucydides was disinterested in the person of Pericles, nor that Plutarch was disinterested in the historical background. In the end, Thucydides has made a statement about Pericles, an individual. Similarly, the above analysis indicates that Plutarch presented an account of words and deeds beyond a singular internal 'psychological evolution,' and gave an attempt at a historical view of the development both of Pericles' character in his station as statesman, and the city of Athens – the state under Pericles' influence. Pericles' psychology has a context; Plutarch has parameterized one part of the meaning of Thucydides' words and expanded them into further historical reasoning on Pericles' personality and role in this context. It is evident from them both

⁴⁰⁹ Duff 1999:90.

⁴¹⁰ *Per.* 15.3.

⁴¹¹ De Romilly 1988:25.

that Pericles did not simply command Athens – a tyrant may do the same – but rather there is a depiction of Pericles as a good and wise statesman, who was not without opposition, albeit opposition he could control. We can say therefore that Plutarch shared the same basic picture of Pericles as Thucydides did, putting weight upon Thucydides' assessment of both the wisdom and political power of Pericles.

However, was Plutarch's developmental solution to divergent sources an example of historiography? Our analysis of Plutarch's decision implies the answer is yes. He was writing on past events regarding Pericles in such a way as to make the best use of other sources, yet be true to Thucydides. In view of the conflicting sources, de Romilly approves of the developmental option as 'in itself admissible and well presented.'⁴¹² However, she also writes it was 'a means of doing away with contrary judgments.'⁴¹³ Our argument would agree in one sense: if Plutarch was eliminating contrary judgments, it was to find the historical Pericles while taking all of the evidence seriously rather than an uncritical dismissal of evidence. He was able to pull together his sources into a coherent narrative, solving contradictions in the record and making reasoned guesses based upon his knowledge of politics, philosophy, and history. This is the kind of activity that historians do, and indeed seems to be an example of historiography.

Before proceeding, it should be noted that one objection to our argument is that Plutarch seems to overlook the evidence from Thucydides and elsewhere that Pericles faced continued opposition during the war. Plutarch's evolutionary narrative in chapters 9-15 depends in large part upon Pericles defeating his opposition to become the statesman of first citizen rule. Thucydides noted opposition to Pericles at the start of the war, as well as the criticism he

⁴¹² De Romilly 1988:23.

⁴¹³ De Romilly 1988:23.

received and eventual removal from position by the Athenians.⁴¹⁴ Kleon in particular may have been opposed to him during the war.⁴¹⁵ However, in the place where Thucydides mentions the opposition, immediately before the conflict when speeches were made on whether or not to declare war on the Peloponnese, not one of his opponents is named, nor were their speeches recorded; only Pericles is named, and only Pericles is given a lengthy speech.⁴¹⁶ Westlake suggests that his silence could be taken to mean that ‘opposition to Pericles was at this time almost negligible.’⁴¹⁷ Though he adds that it does not necessarily mean this, Pericles’ authority is a plausible inference from this passage, a position Gomme also took.⁴¹⁸ Plutarch’s inference then was the kind of inference a historian could make. Further, the radical nature of Pericles’ tactic to withdraw into the city and fight only by sea, plus the length of time it took before Athens finally demoted him, make Plutarch’s interpretation reasonable, especially in view of the re-appointment of Pericles after his demotion and fine that Thucydides records in the same breath as his demotion.⁴¹⁹ Plutarch saw the opposition as present, but with little weight, and needed to bide time until disasters occurred that were great enough to allow them to punish Pericles.⁴²⁰

By chapter 15 then, the narrative is where Plutarch wanted it to be, with Pericles the powerful first citizen of Athens near the start of the war with the Peloponnesians, the sources for which come more frequently from Thucydides. In what follows, we will examine more specific quotations of Thucydides following from the Helmbold and O’Neil collection of Plutarch’s quotations as much as possible, and see how Plutarch’s handling of them can be explained by historical reasoning within his ideological paradigm. We will be assuming that Plutarch had the

⁴¹⁴ Thuc. 2.64.

⁴¹⁵ Hornblower 1991:347.

⁴¹⁶ Thuc. 1.139.

⁴¹⁷ Westlake 1967:27.

⁴¹⁸ Gomme 1950:464.

⁴¹⁹ Thuc. 2.64.

⁴²⁰ *Per.* 34-35.

scroll of Thucydides in front of him from this point until chapter 34, as stated previously, and this will also enter into our understanding of Plutarch's method of using Thucydides.

Chapter 19 and 21 quotations: moving down the scroll of Thucydides

Chapter 19 of *Pericles* carries a narrative of his action in the Peloponnese from Pergae, events also covered by Thucydides in 1.111. Thucydides recorded that Pericles was commander of the expedition with one thousand Athenians, sailed along to Sicyon and won a land battle, and immediately afterward with the Achaeans attacked Oeniadae, a town of Acarnians, besieging but not taking it, then returning home afterwards. Plutarch's account is far more detailed and written in a more positive tone than that of Thucydides, priming his introduction to the story with the admiration Pericles received among foreigners for the feat. Plutarch still carries the same concepts as Thucydides, however, while using his own language. Where Thucydides says 'sailing across' (διαπλεύσαντες πέραν) to Oeniade, Plutarch states 'proceeding to the opposite land' (τὴν ἀντιπέραν ἢπειρον ἐκομίσθη). There are repetitions of Thucydides as well, such as their 'return home': the ἀπεχώρησαν ἐπ' οἴκου from Thucydides is ἀπῆρεν ἐπ' οἴκου in Plutarch.

Positive tone notwithstanding, Plutarch's basic outline is the same as that in Thucydides and repeats much the same idea using altered phrasing or synonyms, but there are two noteworthy exceptions. First, rather than citing the one thousand men as Thucydides recorded, Plutarch said 'one hundred triremes.' He may have obtained the trireme number from another source, though admittedly this is problematic because Diodorus, who may very well share the same positive source as Plutarch, said fifty ships sailed.⁴²¹ Alternatively, this could be Plutarch's estimate of the number of ships that would have sailed on the expedition, based upon the thousand fighting men. The Decree of Themistocles inscription, which allegedly lists the normal

⁴²¹ Diodorus 11.85.

crew of a trireme, prescribes ten hoplites per trireme.⁴²² Elsewhere Thucydides numbered one thousand hoplites and one hundred ships regarding another expedition.⁴²³ If a ten-hoplite contingent was a normal number for a trireme, Plutarch could have made the estimate of triremes that way. The second divergence is the handling of fighting at Oeniade. Thucydides said they attacked and besiege Oeniade, but ‘failed to take it’ (οὐ μέντοι εἰλόν γε). Plutarch’s text gives no indication that Pericles attempted to take the city. Rather, he ‘shut the people of Oeniade into the walls’ (κατέκλεισεν Οἰνιάδας εἰς τὸ τεῖχος) making the mere fact that they had to flee inside the fortifications a Periclean success. Plutarch did not deny there was a siege or that it failed, but he focused on the bright side of the fact.

As mentioned above, the additional non-Thucydidean details Plutarch includes are positive in nature. Stadter notices that Plutarch’s affirmative take is similar to that of Diodorus, so he is not alone in this assessment of the successful nature of the campaign, even if he expresses it more strongly than Diodorus.⁴²⁴ Plutarch and Diodorus both agree that Acarnania was taken except for Oeniade, and that it was a famous action which others heard about, though while Diodorus talks of leadership without naming anyone, Plutarch attributed the fame to Pericles. This would be an obvious inference, because Pericles *was* the general. However, that both Plutarch and Diodorus thought the expedition went well indicates that Ephorus, another source for Plutarch about Pericles which is no longer extant,⁴²⁵ also had more positive details. But even if we believe that Plutarch’s added details were not actually in Ephorus, they could also be explained by historical understanding. Plutarch has Pericles setting up a trophy after the battle

⁴²² See Fornara 55. The number of men-at-arms seems to have varied, however. See Jordan 2000:81-101.

⁴²³ Thuc. 2.23.

⁴²⁴ Stadter 1989:214. See Diodorus 11.85, 11.88 for his account. The more negative inclusions of Diodorus are the failed siege and Lacedaemonian involvement causing the Athenian withdrawal.

⁴²⁵ Stadter 1989:214.

with the Sicyonians.⁴²⁶ Neither Thucydides nor Diodorus record this, but Plutarch's logical inference from the victory could have been this way: setting up a trophy is normal after a victorious battle, therefore Pericles must have done so.

Plutarch continues the story of Pericles on his expeditions in Sinope, then discusses Pericles' strength in restraining the impulses of the citizens to press their fortune to take Egypt, Sicily, Tuscany, or Carthage, and how Pericles directed them to focus on maintaining what they already had and keeping Sparta in check.⁴²⁷ Here, the next section of Thucydides found value as a source for Plutarch, on the subject of the Sacred War.

The structure of them is very similar, and worth repeating here.

Λακεδαιμόνιοι δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα τὸν ἱερὸν καλούμενον πόλεμον ἐστράτευσαν, καὶ κρατήσαντες τοῦ ἐν Δελφοῖς ἱεροῦ παρέδοσαν Δελφοῖς· καὶ αὖθις ὕστερον Ἀθηναῖοι ἀποχωρησάντων αὐτῶν στρατεύσαντες καὶ κρατήσαντες παρέδοσαν Φωκεῦσιν.

After this the Spartans engaged in the campaign known as the sacred war. They took over the temple at Delphia and give it back to the Delphians. As soon as they had retired, the Athenians marched out, took the temple again, and gave it back to the Phocians.⁴²⁸

And Plutarch:

ἐπεὶ γὰρ οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι στρατεύσαντες εἰς Δελφοὺς Φωκέων ἐχόντων τὸ ἱερὸν Δελφοῖς ἀπέδωκαν, εὐθὺς ἐκείνων ἀπαλλαγέντων ὁ Περικλῆς ἐπιστρατεύσας πάλιν εἰσήγαγε τοὺς Φωκέας.

The Lacedaemonians made an expedition to Delphi while the Phocians had possession of the sanctuary there, and restored it to the Delphians; but no sooner had the Lacedaemonians departed than Pericles made a counter expedition and reinstated the Phocians.⁴²⁹

Plutarch has quoted from Thucydides, though he added extra details to help clarify the situation of the Phocian occupation of Delphi. The differences in wording are stylistic, but Plutarch's important shift was to 'Pericles' being named as the respondent rather than the 'Athenians.'

⁴²⁶ *Per.* 19.3.

⁴²⁷ *Per.* 20-21.

⁴²⁸ Thuc. 1.112.5, Warner trans.

⁴²⁹ *Per.* 21.2.

Stadter thinks it ‘unlikely that another source was more precise’ and posits this is a change on Plutarch’s part.⁴³⁰ This reassignment of subject would make sense to Plutarch historically. If Pericles really controlled Athens as first citizen, then the decisions of Athens would also be the decisions of Pericles, and Pericles would be at the forefront of any such important action. Plutarch told this specific story of the Sacred War to demonstrate the foreign policy, power, and wisdom of Pericles. If the assembly decided on an action, by Plutarch’s picture, it would have been the will of Pericles as well, who would not allow the people to veer away from any of his own plans for their best interests. While the change serves the practical literary purpose of glorying Pericles, it also reveals his idea of the historical situation and its causes.

Plutarch continues from chapters 22-28 in anecdotes of Pericles and Aspasia and the war with the Samians, which is also covered in some way by Thucydides,⁴³¹ but the narrative is supplemented by a mix of other sources such as Ephorus and comedies. Following Helmbold and O’Neil, we will proceed over to the next quotations in 29, which discusses the start of the Peloponnesian War and Pericles’ role within it.

Chapter 29 analysis: Explaining the start of the Peloponnesian War

Thucydides has a causation narrative in which Potidaea was under blockade by Athens,⁴³² and this was the final reason for Corinth to complain directly to Sparta.⁴³³ Corinth told other allies to send delegates to complain as well. Aegina secretly played a major part in encouraging the Spartans to war, though they were too afraid to send an open delegation, and finally Megara also sent diplomats with serious grievances due to their exclusion from the agora of Athens and

⁴³⁰ Stadter 1989:224.

⁴³¹ See Thuc. 1.114.

⁴³² Thuc.1.66.

⁴³³ Thuc. 1.67.

all the ports under Athenian dominion, contrary to the treaty (σπονδάς). After narrating the naval action involving Corcyra, Plutarch summarizes Thucydides' narrative here in the following way:

The Corinthians were incensed at this procedure, [of helping Corcyra] and denounced the Athenians at Sparta, and were joined by the Megarians, who brought their complaint that from every market-place and from all the harbours over which the Athenians had control, they were excluded and driven away, contrary to the common law and the formal oaths of the Greeks; the Aeginetans also, deeming themselves wronged and outraged, kept up a secret wailing in the ears of the Lacedaemonians, since they had not the courage to accuse the Athenians openly. At this juncture Potidaea, too, a city that was subject to Athens, although a colony of Corinth, revolted, and the siege laid to her hastened on the war all the more.⁴³⁴

Plutarch agrees with Thucydides 1.67 that the Corinthians were upset and denounced Athens at Sparta, joined by Megarians, who complained of their exclusion from ports under Athenian control, with the Aeginetans secretly (κρύφα) working as well. However, it reveals three significant differences. First, Plutarch collapsed the narrative and shifted the causation chain – immediately before the Corinthian delegation, he told the story of Pericles sending ships to Corcyra, and it is at this that the Corinthians are incensed. Second, there are several shifts on Corinth's allies: the Megarians are mentioned second after Corinth, a reversal of Thucydides' order, and Thucydides' neutral statement of Aegina's fear of Athens (δεδιότες τοὺς Ἀθηναίους) turns to lacking courage (οὐ θαρροῦντες), along with mere statement (λέγοντες) of grievances upgraded to the added imagery of 'crying' (ἐποτιῶντο) to the Spartans. Third, Plutarch does not ignore the Potidaean siege, but appends it to the end of the episode rather than the beginning as in the *History*.

These differences reveal historiographical thinking on Plutarch's part. He seemed to have held the Corcyran issue to be the main causal factor in sending the delegation. This is a reasonable conclusion from elsewhere in Thucydides, where Athenian alliance with Corcyra had

⁴³⁴ *Per.* 29.1-2.

left Corinth angry and seeking a way to retaliate against Athens.⁴³⁵ A key issue in the Corcyra situation was their navy – several places in the *History* it is stated that Corcyra had a strong navy, comparable to only two other navies among the Greeks – Athens and Corinth.⁴³⁶ With a conflict with the Peloponnesians on the horizon at this point in the narrative, Plutarch might have seen the prospect of Corcyra and its navy going to one side or the other to be more important than Potidaea's revolt. He knew that the Sybota battle as Thucydides tells it involved hundreds of ships, making it the largest naval battle fought between two Greek states up to that time.⁴³⁷ Athenian involvement in Corcyra was completely contingent on the navy – their ten ships observing the battle were not to interfere unless Corinth pressed on and attempted to make a landing on their shores.⁴³⁸ Plutarch elsewhere praises the concept of a strong navy, as he does in his *Themistocles*, giving Themistocles credit for building the Athenian navy that saved Greece and including motifs in common with Thucydides on the value of naval power for Athens against the infantry of other Greek states.⁴³⁹ Sea power was certainly important for *Pericles* as well, due to the design of Pericles to place the burden of victory upon the Athenian navy and refuse hoplite battles with the Spartans. This follows from what he says later, in agreement with Thucydides, that Pericles' strategy to refuse infantry battles and focus on naval warfare was the wise tactic.⁴⁴⁰ Plutarch did mention as an apparent afterthought the Potidaean situation in a nod to Thucydides, adding that it 'hastened on the war all the more,' yet he has reduced its causal power.

The description of the other allies has a significant interpretive factor. In the section immediately after this one, Plutarch puts forth considerable discussion on the Megarian decree, and the reversal of order with the Aeginetans shows his priority on this decree in causing the

⁴³⁵ See Thuc. 1.56.

⁴³⁶ Thuc. 1.25, 1.33, and especially 1.36.

⁴³⁷ Thuc. 1.50.

⁴³⁸ Thuc. 1.44-45.

⁴³⁹ *Them.* 4.

⁴⁴⁰ *Per.* 34.2, Thuc. 2.65.

war.⁴⁴¹ Thucydides' line runs as follows: 'The Megarians, who presented a great many other grievances, and chiefly this, that they were excluded from the harbours throughout the Athenian dominions and from the Athenian market, contrary to the treaty.'⁴⁴² (Μεγαρήs, δηλοῦντες μὲν καὶ ἕτερα οὐκ ὀλίγα διάφορα, μάλιστα δὲ λιμένων τε εἵργεσθαι τῶν ἐν τῇ Ἀθηναίων ἀρχῇ καὶ τῆς Ἀττικῆς ἀγορᾶς παρὰ τὰς σπονδάς.). Stadter observes that Plutarch doubles and parallels the complaint: πάσης μὲν ἀγορᾶς, πάντων δὲ λιμένων, ὧν Ἀθηναῖοι κρατοῦσιν, εἵργεσθαι καὶ ἀπελαύνεσθαι παρὰ τὰ κοινὰ δίκαια.⁴⁴³ The doubling of universalized adjectives, along with parallel terms of exclusion and abnormality intensifies this complaint, and serves a historiographical aim. Plutarch's emphasis introduces the urgency of the Megarians' situation on which he is about to elaborate in relation to Pericles' role in starting the war. Aegina had been forced into the Delian League with Athens about twenty-five years previously,⁴⁴⁴ therefore any open opposition to Athens would be dangerous. Plutarch may be positing a more negative perspective on their activity, with the juxtaposed ideas of wailing (ἐποτινῶντο) and having no courage. Stadter notices that Plutarch mostly uses the term πότνια, denoting cry of 'horror, indignation, or entreaty,' to describe an action of women.⁴⁴⁵ Courage (θαρροῦντες) was used positively for facing death and combat elsewhere, so the lack of this courage was undesirable.⁴⁴⁶

Plutarch's concentration has been from 1.67 in the *History*, but from here Thucydides includes speeches of the Corinthians, Athenians, King Archidamus, then the Pentecontaetia excursus before proceeding to another Spartan congress that actually voted the for the war. These are irrelevant to the *Pericles*. By 1.126 the embassies moving between Athens and Sparta are

⁴⁴¹ Stadter 1989:269. The emphasis Plutarch places on the Megarian decree in the causation of the war may go back to another of his sources, Ephorus. See Parmeggiani 2014:128-130.

⁴⁴² Thuc. 1.67.4.

⁴⁴³ Stadter 1989:269.

⁴⁴⁴ See Thuc. 1.108, Gomme 1950:225.

⁴⁴⁵ Stadter 1989:270. Cf. *Caesar* 63.9, *Cato Minor* 27.2.

⁴⁴⁶ See *Pelopidas* 17.5, *Cato Minor* 69.5.

important, though Thucydides has an irrelevant excursus on the origins of the ‘curses’ and stories of Pausanias and Themistocles. Plutarch seems to have moved ahead with his scroll to 1.139, where Thucydides finally wrapped up his other explanations and continues his narrative of the build-up to the war. In this chapter, Thucydides includes several diplomatic missions: first the Spartan demand to drive out the curse of the goddess and the Athenian counter-demand, then another set of Spartan demands that Athens stop the siege of Potidaea, free Aegina, and revoke the Megarian decree. Finally, there is a third mission from Sparta with the ultimatum to free the Hellenes, at which point an assembly was called and Pericles stands to give a speech that they not submit the Spartan demands.

This Thucydidean chapter serves as Plutarch’s basis for the next paragraph in chapter 29, which discusses the Megarian decree. Plutarch generalized the three embassies of Thucydides into Athens, stating that since the Spartan King Archidamus wanted to avoid the war through these embassies to satisfy his allies, the only other reason for going to war was the Megarian decree. The wording of Plutarch (οὐκ ἂν δοκεῖ συμπεσεῖν ὑπὸ γε τῶν ἄλλων αἰτιῶν ὁ πόλεμος τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις, εἰ τὸ ψήφισμα καθελεῖν τὸ Μεγαρικὸν ἐπέισθησαν καὶ διαλλαγῆναι πρὸς αὐτούς) is similar to Thucydides (καὶ μάλιστα γε πάντων καὶ ἐνδηλότατα προύλεγον τὸ περὶ Μεγαρέων ψήφισμα καθελοῦσι μὴ ἂν γίνεσθαι πόλεμον). Stadter writes that Plutarch ‘ignores the statement of Thucydides (1.126.1) that they had already decided on war but considered that the embassies would establish a better justification for the decision.’⁴⁴⁷ It might be argued that Plutarch was simply following what Thucydides actually said at this juncture in 1.139, and there was no attempt to harmonize Thucydides’ previous divergent statements. However, this would still seem misleading, as Plutarch implied that the war was still avoidable at this point, and that the embassies were sent because there was still a possibility of peace, with no other explanation

⁴⁴⁷ Stadter 1989:270.

given. Did Plutarch forget about the Peloponnesian vote for war in 1.126? If not, why is it ignored?

Thinking through the ways Plutarch was using the scroll of Thucydides and Plutarch's broader historical understanding helps answer this problem. As Plutarch moved the scroll from 1.67 to 1.139, he would have come across the initial debate at Sparta, where four speeches are given about the grievances against Athens. King Archidamus gives one of these speeches, and suggests to not rush to war, but attempt to divert it by sending an embassy about Potidaea and other grievances while preparing for war just in case.⁴⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the ephors put it to a vote and war is decided upon.⁴⁴⁹

Coming across that passage, Plutarch may have thought that Archidamus had power at that time, as king, to influence against the assembly's declaration. In *Cleomenes* there is a passage detailing that the kings of Sparta were given more power by the lawgiver Lycurgus, and ephors were only given more power much later due to the stresses of the Messenian War; furthermore, in the post-Peloponnesian War period, the ephors were unjustly usurping power from the kings by banishment, putting them to death without trial, or forcing them to do their will by fear.⁴⁵⁰ Plutarch was aware that these abuses of the ephors occurred in the aftermath of Sparta's success in the Peloponnesian War, when Sparta had become corrupted by 'luxury and greed,' so that a few became powerful and rich and most became poor.⁴⁵¹ Plutarch may therefore have been combining his knowledge of King Archidamus' reluctance for war and his idea concerning the king's strong authority in the pre-Peloponnesian War period (before money and greed came to Sparta) to say that peace was still possible. Even if the ephors and Spartan

⁴⁴⁸ Thuc. 1.85.

⁴⁴⁹ Thuc. 1.86-88.

⁴⁵⁰ *Cleomenes* 10.

⁴⁵¹ See *Agis* 3.1, 5.

assembly saw their diplomacy to be searching for pretexts, the plan of Archidamus could have been the opposite, to prevent these pretexts from coming to fruition. Though the Spartan assembly voted for war, the war did not start immediately, as Thucydides states himself,⁴⁵² and since they were looking for further excuse for war, Plutarch could have interpreted this vote as inadequate for actual action, so that they were essentially following Archidamus' advice anyway. Thucydides himself explicitly pointed to the Megarian decree as the main point of contention, so that the war could still be avoided at this point if the Athenians would revoke it.⁴⁵³ Another source that could have suggested this understanding to Plutarch was his later anecdote⁴⁵⁴ about the Spartan envoy's clever suggestion that the decree be turned around, which, if true, means that 'some Spartans at least were still doing their best to avoid war,' as Gomme comments.⁴⁵⁵ Archidamus having a counter-scheme would also fit well with Plutarch's idea of great men driving history, theorizing that a wise, capable king of Sparta as Archidamus would try to do what was best for his people.⁴⁵⁶

The last sentence of this chapter draws the causes for the war together to show why people blamed Pericles.⁴⁵⁷ We have seen that Plutarch had ample reasons, drawing from some places in Thucydides at least, for considering that the war was avoidable up to this point. Combining these ideas together – King Archidamus' desire to avoid war, Sparta still needing a further pretext for war, Sparta's allies being angry about the decree – means that if Athens revoked the Megarian decree, the war would not occur. Pericles was instrumental in Athenian stubbornness, and was therefore held responsible for the war. If Thucydides said the Megarian

⁴⁵² Thuc. 1.125.

⁴⁵³ Thuc. 1.139.

⁴⁵⁴ *Per.* 30.1.

⁴⁵⁵ Gomme 1950:449.

⁴⁵⁶ Of course, Plutarch does not reveal his this process to us, but we are exploring ways he could have used historical reasoning based upon what we know of his ideology.

⁴⁵⁷ *Per.* 29.5.

decree was the main point of contention, and Pericles, the leading, most powerful man in Athens,⁴⁵⁸ was instrumental in keeping it a point of contention, then he would be held responsible for the outbreak of the war.

The *Pericles* narrative continues in 30 to 32, drawing from other sources, discussing Pericles and the Spartan embassies, especially on the Megarian decree, as well dutifully reporting accusations that Pericles was fomenting war to distract the pressure that him and his associates were facing at this time from litigation. The next important employment of Thucydides, however, is in chapter 33.

Chapter 33: Sparta against Pericles and Pericles' control of Athens

For chapters 33 to 35 Thucydides made up the core source for Plutarch, with the exception of two or three minor places where another source was used.⁴⁵⁹ Plutarch moved back in the scroll from 1.139 to 1.126, and picked up again at the Spartan embassies, saying that they ordered them to drive out the 'Cylonian curse' (ἐκέλευον αὐτοὺς τὸ ἄγος ἐλαύνειν τὸ Κυλώνειον) in order to instigate the Athenians to depose Pericles and find them more flexible. The phrase of Thucydides is that they 'ordered them to drive out the curse of the goddess' ἐκέλευον τοὺς Ἀθηναίους τὸ ἄγος ἐλαύνειν τῆς θεοῦ. Plutarch's replacement of 'goddess' with 'Cylon' allows him to collapse the story of the curse into one word.⁴⁶⁰

A significant note on Plutarch's use of this chapter is the change in the chain of causation. He omitted mention of the first part of 1.126 that the embassies were sent to find a pretext for war. Reasons for omission have been discussed above, but it is important to note here that Plutarch focused on the agency of Pericles – it is Pericles' upholding of Athenian power, whether for good reasons or bad, that controls the entire situation. An important theme in this

⁴⁵⁸ Thucydides reiterates this in 1.139.

⁴⁵⁹ Stadter 1989:305.

⁴⁶⁰ Cylon was the man who seized the acropolis and whose suppliant followers were killed.

biography is Pericles' grasp of affairs and success over his opponents – despite what the Lacedaemonians and his Athenian opponents schemed, Pericles was able to out-manoeuvre them. If Sparta desired a pretext for war, it may seem like Pericles is playing into their hands by refusing it, which would not fit Plutarch's understanding of the situation. On the other hand, if Sparta wished to avoid war by making Athens submit, Pericles' refusal forces Sparta into the war. Plutarch was making interpretive decisions from the evidence based upon the historical pattern of a character's consistent overturning of his opponents' will.⁴⁶¹

By placing the pollution story at this point in the narrative, Plutarch has deviated from the chronological order in which Thucydides lists the embassies, both in his narrative order from 1.126 to 1.146, and also from his summary in 1.139, which Plutarch had just used earlier for chapter 29. Pelling has noted Plutarch's general freedom in maneuvering the order of things throughout the *Lives*, or what he calls 'displacement.'⁴⁶² Chapters 29-33 are not precise chronological lines, but an effort to explain the start of the war in the logic of a single block.⁴⁶³

As seen above, Plutarch probably regarded the Megarian decree as the key issue in the start of the war, and in introducing the build-up to the war, this was deemed more appropriate to include first. A further argument for this was Thucydides' own statement that the demand was not serious, but only a political move against Pericles.⁴⁶⁴ Placing the curse here serves another important function in explaining how Pericles regained popularity in the face of the internal attacks against him. The city depends upon Pericles when it is in danger, which allowed Pericles to capitalize on the tensions with Sparta – a point which Plutarch records, though he was not sure

⁴⁶¹ Thuc. 1.127 may also have played a role in Plutarch's understanding, because it states Sparta's hope to remove Pericles so they could get their own way with Athens, though this failed.

⁴⁶² Pelling 2011:92-93.

⁴⁶³ The imprecise 'about this time' to introduce Aspasia's trial is an example of this (*Per.* 32.1).

⁴⁶⁴ Thuc. 1.127.

that this record is true.⁴⁶⁵ Thucydides provided another explanation which allows Plutarch to show Pericles' support without resorting to dependence on the warmongering explanation.⁴⁶⁶

The Spartan attempts against Pericles backfired, giving him 'even greater confidence and honour among the citizens than before, because they saw that their enemies hated and feared him above all other men.'⁴⁶⁷ The hostility that other sources record is now reconciled with Thucydides' picture of his power over the people.

Plutarch finishes the sentence with explicit citation of Thucydides (1.127.1) (Περικλέα τὸν Ξανθίππου προσεχόμενον αὐτῷ κατὰ τὴν μητέρα) explaining that the curse was connected to Pericles' family on his mother's side (τὸ μητρόθεν γένος τοῦ Περικλέους ἔνοχον ἦν). We see that he changed vocabulary and clausal structure to make it his own. The first part of this sentence is also from 1.127.1, where Thucydides said the Lacedaemonians thought that if Pericles were exiled, they would receive concessions from Athens. Thucydides added, however, that they did not actually expect Athens to exile Pericles, but hoped to make him unpopular and blame the war on him.

Plutarch holds out the possibility that Pericles be deposed (καταλυθέντος), but leaves out that Sparta expected to hurt his reputation rather than actually have him exiled. Plutarch could mean this term for 'depose' in a broad sense of Pericles losing the position he had, though not necessarily exiled. The word is used for the dissolution of the oligarchy at Samos, which overthrew its power yet apparently did not exile everyone in the oligarchy.⁴⁶⁸ Stadter observes that this word is used more of political structures tumbling than the fall of individuals,⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁵ *Per.* 32.3.

⁴⁶⁶ *Thuc.* 1.126.

⁴⁶⁷ *Per.* 33.1.

⁴⁶⁸ *Per.* 25.2.

⁴⁶⁹ Cf. *Per.* 3.1.

although it is used of the exile of Thucydides of Alopecce in chapter 6.⁴⁷⁰ The tactic to generate blame against Pericles for the war and thereby reduce his popularity, exile or not, worked in the long run when the Athenians eventually fined and removed him from office after the plague.⁴⁷¹ On the other hand, in light of Pericles' eventual chastisement, plus the hostile, anti-Pericles forces present in his other sources, Plutarch could have had καταλυθέντος to mean actual exile, believing the exile tactic more plausible than Thucydides let on. Pericles' friends were under litigation and many kinds of accusations were being thrown against him, implying he was by no means invincible. Either way, Plutarch appears to give an implicit nod to Thucydides in that the demand to remove the curse was a popularity challenge anyway, as his statement of the backfiring of the plan is constructed in terms of the Spartan hopes of 'suspicion and slander' towards Pericles when actually it increased his honour.

However, this statement of an increase in the popularity of Pericles from the Cylonian curse demand is not found in the *History*. Stadter says that while there is no such statement from Thucydides, there is a statement of the peoples' trust in Pericles in 1.145, suggesting that Plutarch 'draws his own conclusion' from this.⁴⁷² This would be consistent with what has been argued above – if the sources critical of Pericles were correct, then the opposition Pericles was facing must have turned around at the start of the war, especially in light of the fact that Athenians from rural environs pulled into the city in a break from tradition, following 'the advice he gave them and brought in from the country their wives and children and all their household goods, taking down even the wood-work on the houses themselves.'⁴⁷³ Plutarch made an

⁴⁷⁰ Stadter 1989:86. Interestingly, it was used of throwing a king out of power, as in *Publicola* 18.1.

⁴⁷¹ *Per.* 35.

⁴⁷² Stadter 1989:308. There has been some suggestion that this information is from Ephorus rather than an inference, but Stadter rejects this.

⁴⁷³ Thuc. 2.14.1.

inference on how the people must have taken the challenge, based upon a synthesis of critical sources and the Thucydidean picture of an authoritative Pericles.

Plutarch's next sentence is sourced in Thucydides 2.13, and preserves its causation structure. Thucydides states that Archidamus was gathering the Peloponnesians on the isthmus, and Pericles suspected Archidamus might spare his fields out of their guest-friendship, or to encourage accusations against him from the Athenians. Therefore, Pericles spoke to the assembly stating that in spite of his friendship with Archidamus, he would not allow any harm to come to the city, and if his fields were not ravaged as the others were, he would discharge them to the people so that no one would raise suspicions against him. Plutarch summarized the long sentence about marching to the isthmus to a cleaner 'before Archidamus invaded Attica with the Peloponnesians.' (πρὶν ἐμβαλεῖν εἰς τὴν Ἀττικὴν τὸν Ἀρχίδαμον ἔχοντα τοὺς Πελοποννησίους).

Plutarch skips Thucydides' description of Pericles' mental realization, avoiding the repetition, and goes straight to Pericles' proclamation in the assembly. Plutarch writes that Pericles made a 'proclamation' (προεῖπε) to the Athenians rather than a 'speech' (προηγόρευε) as the *History* says. Plutarch has taken this word that Thucydides used for the Spartan proclamation (προεῖπον) of the curse earlier in the sentence to impute action to Pericles. This helps confirm that Plutarch had Thucydides' text in front of him as he said the same idea in his own words. When paraphrasing one sentence of a text, a word may be taken from elsewhere on the same page of the work and embedded in the paraphrase. By saying 'proclamation,' Plutarch was also able to omit Thucydides' 'in the assembly' as this verb implies a public statement to the assembly anyway.

[...] ὅτι Ἀρχίδαμος μὲν οἱ ξένος εἶη, οὐ μέντοι ἐπὶ κακῷ γε τῆς πόλεως γένοιτο, τοὺς δὲ ἀγροὺς τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ καὶ οἰκίας ἦν ἄρα μὴ δηώσωσιν οἱ πολέμοι ὥσπερ καὶ τὰ τῶν ἄλλων, ἀφίησιν αὐτὰ δημόσια εἶναι, καὶ μηδεμίαν οἱ ὑποψίαν κατὰ ταῦτα γίγνεσθαι.

[...] that he had relations of hospitality with Archidamus but this was not to be a source of harm to the city: if the enemy did not ravage his land and houses as they did those of others, he would give them up to be public property, and no suspicion should attach to him in connection with this.⁴⁷⁴

[...] ἂν ἄρα τᾶλλα δηῶν ὁ Ἀρχίδαμος ἀπέχηται τῶν ἐκείνου διὰ τὴν ξενίαν τὴν οὔσαν αὐτοῖς, ἢ διαβολῆς τοῖς ἐχθροῖς ἐνδιδούς ἀφορμάς, ὅτι τῇ πόλει καὶ τὴν χώραν καὶ τὰς ἐπαύλεις ἐπιδίδωσιν

[...] that in case Archidamus, while ravaging everything else, should spare his estates, either out of regard for the friendly tie that existed between them, or with an eye to affording his enemies grounds for slander, he would make over to the city his lands and the homesteads thereon.⁴⁷⁵

Plutarch changed clausal and word order as we have come to expect, but shared some necessary points of vocabulary. Thucydides' 'suspicion' (ὕποψίαν) turns into 'slander' (διαβολῆς).

Plutarch uses the word for suspicion elsewhere in conjunction with an accusation, as he does in *Pyrrhus*, where Pyrrhus holds the Sicilians in suspicion, and one of them is accused of betrayal and executed, and another flees beforehand, presumably to avoid the same fate.⁴⁷⁶ Plutarch presumed that Pericles' opponents were ready to pounce on any opportunity, and given the foregoing account in chapter 32 of accusations of bribery, called διαβολάς there by Plutarch, this presumption is not unreasonable. Plutarch had also stated his agreement with Thucydides elsewhere,⁴⁷⁷ that Pericles was disinterested and superior to bribery, doing everything for the glory of Athens, so these would be empty accusations.⁴⁷⁸

Another observation we can make on this text is the flexing of perspective on the enemy. Thucydides stated the possibility that Archidamus and the enemy (πολέμιοι) might not harm his land; Plutarch individualized the enemy by making Archidamus the subject, and the abstract category of an 'enemy' shifts over to Pericles' political enemies. Plutarch's word for it is

⁴⁷⁴ Thuc. 2.13.1, Rhodes trans.

⁴⁷⁵ *Per.* 33.2.

⁴⁷⁶ *Pyrrhus* 23.

⁴⁷⁷ Thuc. 1.27.1.

⁴⁷⁸ *Per.* 15.

different (ἐχθροῖς), but the tension of opposition remains, regulated to his foes within Athens. This reflects Plutarch's concern with the evidence of Pericles' opposition within Athens; it still existed at this point, and Thucydides implies as much in bringing up the possibility of suspicion being generated, but Plutarch makes it more clear. This also fits one of the themes of this biography, presenting Pericles as being opposed to the Spartans on one side and the Athenian foolhardiness on the other, a personal siege found in both Thucydidean and non-Thucydidean sources which Plutarch seeks to emphasize, making a contribution to the understanding of Pericles and his historical context.

Now, the rest of Thucydides 2.13 actually contains a much larger speech of Pericles, including not only the assignment of his property, but also arguments for his strategy of the war and encouraging the Athenians, the 'same advice as before.' The next sections are details about the rural people within the walls, and background histories of rural life and oracles, then moves to the initial Peloponnesian activity besieging Oenoe. Plutarch skips over this material as irrelevant, stating simply the Peloponnesian invasion and their encampment at Acharnae, facts taken ahead from 2.20.

Coming now to the next portion of chapter 33, Thucydides 2.21 now provides the base source, though Plutarch drops out extraneous detail, such as the stages of the Peloponnesian march, the mention of past invasions of Pleistoanax and the Persians, and the cavalry skirmish. In common with Thucydides he wrote that they went up to Acharnae, cutting the area down in order to entice the Athenians to fight, though Thucydides' statement that they hoped to cause Athens internal discord is omitted, probably because Plutarch had already addressed this before. Plutarch uses similar vocabulary, but does not copy Thucydides, such as his δηοῦντες τὴν χώραν instead of γῆς τεμνομένης, and οὐκ ἀνεξομένων instead of οὐκέτι ἀνασχετὸν.

Whereas Thucydides begins with the feelings and activity of the people in Athens, then proceeds to Pericles, Plutarch begins immediately with Pericles' reaction to the Spartan attempt to goad Athens into battle.⁴⁷⁹ The theme here is Pericles' resoluteness and good judgment against the passions of the people, which is shown in Plutarch's use of the *History*. Plutarch writes a phrase verbatim from 2.21.2, δεινὸν ἐφαίνετο, but the subject has completely shifted. In Thucydides, it is the Athenians who saw ravaging of their land as a terrible thing, but Plutarch seems to answer this objection in Pericles' own mind, that Pericles thought it was a terrible thing to join a risky battle against such a large enemy force.⁴⁸⁰ Plutarch's numbers of the enemy at sixty thousand strong seems too high to modern historians, but it is not from Thucydides and it is difficult to determine where Plutarch found the figure; his emphasis points to an actual source rather than free invention.⁴⁸¹ Plutarch's idea that the entire city would be at stake is not from Thucydides, but this would be a proper inference if he believed the large size of the Peloponnesian army, as it would have required the Athenians to commit their full forces.

Plutarch's next sentence is loosely based on 2.22.1. Pericles' admonishment contrasting the value of men and trees is not sourced from Thucydides, but Stadter sees the resemblance to ideas in Pericles' speech in 1.143.5.⁴⁸² Already assuming that the land-wasting had upset the people, Plutarch states that Pericles tried to keep them calm (κατεπράυνε) with this encouragement. Thucydides said something similar, that he tried to keep the city calm (ἡσυχίας) and under guard as he could.⁴⁸³ Plutarch will pick up on the guard image later, but he states in the second sentence that Pericles did not call the people into the assembly (εἰς ἐκκλησίαν οὐ συνῆγε). This is taken from Thucydides, who says ἐκκλησίαν τε οὐκ ἐποίει αὐτῶν οὐδὲ ξύλλογον

⁴⁷⁹ *Per.* 33.4.

⁴⁸⁰ This point is also observed by Moles 1992:290.

⁴⁸¹ Stadter 1989:310. Stadter conjectures it could be from Ephorus or perhaps a note in Plutarch's manuscript of Thucydides.

⁴⁸² Stadter 1989:310.

⁴⁸³ Thuc. 2.22.1.

οὐδένα, emphatically stating that Pericles did not call an assembly nor a *ξύλλογον*. Gomme understands this word to mean ‘an informal meeting of citizens’ in this context.⁴⁸⁴ Hornblower disagrees, and refers to it as a ‘military meeting,’⁴⁸⁵ as it obviously would discuss whether to make the foray or not. Plutarch drops this phrase in order to focus upon the assembly of the *demos*. How Pericles, as one of the generals, had the constitutional power to postpone the regular official assembly is controversial in modern scholarship. Stadter suggests it was a special military, or ‘crisis’ meeting that he avoided, or that Pericles had the power to delay the official meeting until the Peloponnesians withdrew.⁴⁸⁶ Gomme and Rhodes agree with the former, since there is no evidence that generals could stop the regular assembly.⁴⁸⁷ Hornblower argues that generals had more power than is often assumed, but suggests Pericles could have pressured other officials to call it off as well.⁴⁸⁸ Plutarch accepted the authority of Thucydides’ account without question, however. In light of Thucydides’ other statements about Pericles’ power in the city, and Plutarch’s acceptance of this in strong terms earlier that ‘of his power there can be no doubt’ based upon both Thucydides and the gibes of the comic poets,⁴⁸⁹ it was not abnormal for Pericles to prevent the meeting. With the greater body of now-lost fourth century literature known to Plutarch, he may have even had a better understanding of the mechanics of government in Athens than modern scholarship on some of these points.

Plutarch’s explanation for the repression of the assembly was Pericles ‘fearing he would be constrained against his judgment (*παρὰ γνώμην*).’ As noted above, Plutarch left out *γνώμη* before, but it is brought back here and is found in the text of Thucydides before him.⁴⁹⁰ There,

⁴⁸⁴ Gomme 1956:76.

⁴⁸⁵ Hornblower 1991:275. His translation is based upon several prior linguistic studies as well.

⁴⁸⁶ Stadter 1989:311.

⁴⁸⁷ Gomme 1956:76, Rhodes 1988:206-207.

⁴⁸⁸ Hornblower 1991:275-276.

⁴⁸⁹ *Per.* 16.1.

⁴⁹⁰ *Thuc.* 2.22.1.

Thucydides refers to judgment as *the* correct way, which the people may act against if they are called together for a decision. Plutarch on the other hand associates this term more closely with Pericles, that the people would force him against γνώμην. De Romilly argues that Plutarch's usage is more personalized to Pericles, assigning a motive to Pericles that Thucydides did not give him, a 'personal desire to act according to his own wishes.'⁴⁹¹ While he likely 'thought he was giving exactly the same explanation, only in different words,' it is actually a 'distortion.'⁴⁹² Thucydides was not constructing the polarity to be 'Pericles against others' as Plutarch portrays it, but another kind of tension, 'within the city and for the city, reason against passion,' the underlying motive being fear that the people would come together and make a decision that would be detrimental to the city.⁴⁹³ This forms a part of Thucydides' overall analysis of democracy found throughout his *History*, the interworking and behaviour of the mob that Plutarch leaves out.⁴⁹⁴ He therefore 'loses the whole point Thucydides was trying to make,' which could be assigned to his aim of biography rather than history.⁴⁹⁵

There are some problems with de Romilly's argument, however.⁴⁹⁶ It is true that Plutarch was personalizing 'judgment' to Pericles, but the meaning of Thucydides was not changed, nor is the assignment of the motive to be Pericles' own wishes equivalent to a shift from what was best for the city or a change from the Thucydidean political analysis. Plutarch considered Pericles' motive not merely to act as he desired, but to act for the sake of the city. This is clear in several places in the *Life*,⁴⁹⁷ as in this passage in 'staking the city itself' on a hoplite battle with the Spartans. Later in the *synkrisis* he maintains that Pericles possessed foresight on how to win the

⁴⁹¹ De Romilly 1988:26.

⁴⁹² De Romilly 1988:26.

⁴⁹³ De Romilly 1988:26.

⁴⁹⁴ De Romilly 1988:26-27.

⁴⁹⁵ De Romilly 1988:27.

⁴⁹⁶ What follows does not detract from de Romilly's broader point that Plutarch's differences reveal the uniqueness and value of Thucydides' account, but focuses on her presentation of what Plutarch was doing.

⁴⁹⁷ Cf. *Per.* 18.1, 21.1, 39.5.

war, as borne out by the events afterward, as well as giving the implication that Pericles' refusal to allow Athens to make concessions to Sparta was noble.⁴⁹⁸ Plutarch's political philosophy and analysis elsewhere is in line with that of Thucydides here, at least in his views of the fickleness of the crowd, as noted above.⁴⁹⁹ As a Platonist, Plutarch especially would have considered 'Reason' to exist independently of Pericles, yet something to which, due to his greatness of character, he had access. Rather than a distortion, Plutarch is making logical inferences from Thucydides' text – if the people's passion represents the irrationality of the mob, and Pericles knew the rational approach, then obviously Plutarch would posit that Pericles possessed this approach within himself. It is the same situation, except it is retold from Pericles' perspective.

Also, Plutarch was at no cross-purpose with Thucydides' didactic aim. One of Thucydides' purposes in writing was to educate the reader about political theory, and Plutarch likewise, except that he was teaching political theory honed through the character of Pericles, an example of an individual acting in reasoned judgment against the hostility of the majority. Plutarch's philosophical beliefs about the ability of the good statesman were at work in his poetic language of Pericles steering the city like the helmsman of a ship, a picture taken from Plato's *Republic*.⁵⁰⁰ The way Plutarch uses this imagery from Plato is especially interesting. Plato's helmsman is an expert in steering the ship, but the others on board are clamoring for the helm, their ignorance of how to steer notwithstanding, and eventually snatch it away from him.⁵⁰¹ Plutarch's citation of this image may foreshadow Pericles' eventual dismissal to Plutarch's audience, if they knew the *Republic*. This Platonic picture fits well with both Thucydides' argument that Pericles alone had the right plan and the others the wrong plan, and also Plutarch's

⁴⁹⁸ Nikolaidis 2008:223-224, Cf. *Per.—Fab. Syn.* 2.3, 3.1.

⁴⁹⁹ See Pelling 2011:211.

⁵⁰⁰ See *Republic* 488A-D.

⁵⁰¹ *Republic* 488B-C.

interpretation of Thucydides: Plutarch ‘almost makes him appear Plato’s philosopher-king’ as Stadter observes,⁵⁰² showing Plutarch’s Platonic ideology at work in his interpretation of Pericles and the historical situation.

Plutarch finishes the sentence by saying that he kept the city under guard (φυλακαῖς), which is comparable to Thucydides’ ἐφύλασσε.⁵⁰³ Pericles paid no heed to the rabble, and instead exercised his own reasoned plans (λογισμοῖς). This word is an equivalent to Thucydides’ term *gnome*, for ‘judgment,’ in Plutarch’s own way, and serves as his own technical term. In examining this word, Duff observes that it carries the idea of ‘reason and reasoned behaviour’ and the ability of a leader to persevere in his *logismoi* in the face of opposition was a mark of greatness and virtue.⁵⁰⁴ Further, this statement about Pericles’ perseverance in his *logismoi* is meant as a comparison with its counterpart Fabius, that Hannibal’s shocking victory at Cannae blew away the *logismoi* of Rome, yet the *logismoi* of Fabius stood firm despite the efforts of Hannibal and the disagreement of his own subordinates.⁵⁰⁵

Plutarch’s next sentence moves backward to Thucydides 2.21.3. Both 2.21 and 2.22 could have been on the same section of open scroll in front of Plutarch, allowing him to jump back and forth in constructing his own narrative. Thucydides says the city was excited with every kind of excitement, angry at Pericles, and abused him for being a general who would not lead them to battle, holding him responsible for all they were suffering.

παντί τε τρόπῳ ἀνηρέθιστο ἡ πόλις καὶ τὸν Περικλέα ἐν ὀργῇ εἶχον, καὶ ὧν παρήνευσε πρότερον ἐμέμνητο οὐδέν, ἀλλ’ ἐκάκιζον ὅτι στρατηγὸς ὧν οὐκ ἐπεξάγοι, αἰτιὸν τε σφίσιν ἐνόμιζον πάντων ὧν ἔπασχον

Thus in every way the city was in a state of irritation; and they were indignant against Pericles, and remembering none of his earlier warnings they abused him because, though

⁵⁰² Stadter 1989:311.

⁵⁰³ Thuc. 2.22.1.

⁵⁰⁴ Duff 1999:80-81.

⁵⁰⁵ Duff 1999:81-82. See *Fabius* 3.6 and 5.4-6.

their general, he would not lead them out, and considered him responsible for all their sufferings.⁵⁰⁶

καίτοι πολλοὶ μὲν αὐτοῦ τῶν φίλων δεόμενοι προσέκειντο, πολλοὶ δὲ τῶν ἐχθρῶν ἀπειλοῦντες καὶ κατηγοροῦντες, χοροὶ¹ δ' ἦδον ἄσματα καὶ σκώμματα πρὸς αἰσχύνην, ἐφυβρίζοντες αὐτοῦ τὴν στρατηγίαν ὥς ἄνδρον καὶ προΐεμένην τὰ πράγματα τοῖς πολεμίοις. ἐπεφύετο δὲ καὶ Κλέων ἤδη, διὰ τῆς πρὸς ἐκεῖνον ὀργῆς τῶν πολιτῶν πορευόμενος

And yet many of his friends beset him with entreaties, and many of his enemies with threats and denunciations, and choruses sang songs of scurrilous mockery, railing at his generalship for its cowardice, and its abandonment of everything to the enemy. Cleon, too, was already harassing him, taking advantage of the wrath with which the citizens regarded him [...].⁵⁰⁷

Plutarch includes what Thucydides says, except their forgetfulness of his prior advice.

Instead, Pericles' verbal advice is internalized into his personal belief and determination to carry it out. There are four areas of addition, which will each be examined in turn. First, he added that Pericles' friends went to him with entreaties. One explanation would guess that with clear sources of enemies stating their opposition to Pericles for not giving battle, Plutarch was using artistic license to balance out enemies with friends.⁵⁰⁸ Alternatively, Plutarch could have had a source at his disposal that mentioned disagreement from Pericles' friends, but this is unknown. The best explanation may be that Plutarch was making historical deductions from Thucydides that Pericles' friends must have actually disagreed with him and pleaded for action. Thucydides implied the entire city except Pericles wanted to go out. He said the city was in every kind (παντί τε τρόπῳ) of excitement (ἀνηρέθιστο) and presented the city collectively blaming Pericles. The universal language could be taken to mean that everyone, even Pericles' supporters, wanted to go out, which would be reasonable, since by Plutarch's Thucydidean understanding the majority of the city supported Pericles. Further, every τρόπῳ of excitement, a word which carries

⁵⁰⁶ Thuc. 2.21.3.

⁵⁰⁷ *Per.* 33.6.

⁵⁰⁸ Stadter 1989:312 comments that friends provides a 'nice balance' to enemies.

connotations of kinds, manner, or direction,⁵⁰⁹ could imply purely anti-Periclean kinds of rancour, upset from Pericles' friends, and discontent from other quarters in between. Thucydides also presented Pericles as standing alone in this tactic. Plutarch considered Pericles a good statesman, and an important quality of such a statesman is making free choices rather than choosing under compulsion of circumstance.⁵¹⁰ Such a presentation from Thucydides would lead Plutarch to believe that a good statesman like Pericles would be making a choice that is freely chosen, as all of the other forces of the city are against his decision. With a desire to present Pericles as determined even in the face of counter-influence from friends, Plutarch could move towards an interpretation that Pericles must have resisted the entreaties of friends as well, who desired that Pericles remain in power and not be overwhelmed by the surge of unpopularity. It would make sense then, from what he reads in Thucydides, that Pericles' friends were pressing him as well.

The second difference is the addition of 'enemies' who denounce and threaten Pericles. The analysis above could equally be applied an 'enemies' inference on Plutarch's part. As has been laid out in his previous chapters, Pericles had opponents who were scratching at removing Pericles from his position of power and popularity, and they would without question take advantage of this very unpopular move to attack Pericles. Plutarch names Kleon here, which Thucydides does not do at this point. Plutarch probably assumed that since Kleon was a demagogue trying to undercut Pericles, he would certainly take the opportunity to attack him now, besides the fact that the Hermippus verses say as much. The addition of 'choruses' singing denunciations of Pericles in Athens makes sense historically, because Hermippus wrote chorus verses that Plutarch quotes here, thus he could say that choruses sang these lines, but Plutarch

⁵⁰⁹ Liddell and Scott.

⁵¹⁰ Wardman 1973:113-114.

evidently assumes that the play was written and performed while the Peloponnesians were still camping and spoiling the land in Attica.

The fourth difference is minor. The general who would not lead them out to battle is turned to the general who is cowardly (ἄνανδρον). The implication from Thucydides is clear enough, that the jeering against the general who does not fight would include an accusation of cowardice. Plutarch did not focus on what the people were actually losing, compared to Thucydides, because showing any for the people's justification of their complaint would detract from his presentation of Pericles' resolve, though he will revisit it in his next chapter.

Chapter 34: Pericles' management of Athenian displeasure

This next chapter is also sourced in Thucydides, in chronological order from where he was before. Thucydides' accounts of the Peloponnesian marches and Athenian financial and administrative decisions are passed over⁵¹¹ and the Athenian fleet's action in the Peloponnese from 2.25 is summarized in two parts as it related to Pericles, with settling of Aegina from 2.27 in the middle. Coming off the last chapter of the criticism of Pericles, it states, 'Pericles was not moved by these things, but gently and silently underwent the ignominy and the hatred, and sending out an armament of a hundred ships against the Peloponnese, did not himself sail with it, but remained behind, keeping the city under watch' until the Peloponnesians withdrew.⁵¹² This agrees with Thucydides that the expedition was sent while the Spartans were still in Attica. Thucydides is silent on whether or not Pericles went with the expedition, though the implication is that he did not – the generals are named (Carcinus, Proteas, and Socrates), and if Pericles was there, Thucydides would have said so. Plutarch assigned a motive to Pericles' staying behind, namely, to keep an eye on the city to be sure they did not deviate from his plan, which Stadter

⁵¹¹ Thuc. 2.23-24.

⁵¹² *Per.* 34.1.

says is Plutarch's 'own deduction.'⁵¹³ With the knowledge that the men in the city wanted badly to go out from the city, Plutarch could guess this to be the reason Pericles did not deploy, as he was the only man keeping them from a march outside the walls and forestalling any meetings to that end. Besides this, we see another example of an agency shift, from 'Athenians' sending out the fleet to Pericles himself sending them.

Plutarch then quotes from 2.27 about the settling of Aegina, along with his own historical analysis. First he states that people (τοὺς πολλοὺς) were distressed over the war and Pericles soothed them by distributions and allotments. This is not in Thucydides, but serves as another explanation for why people were settled in Aegina. Thucydides gave two reasons why the Aeginetans were expelled and replaced. First, they were blamed (αἰτίους) for starting the war, which harkens back to his earlier statement (noted above) that they were secretly speaking with Sparta to foment war. Second, since Aegina lies off the coast of the Peloponnese, it was useful for Athens' own citizens to live and hold the place.⁵¹⁴ Plutarch was silent on these military reasons, and did not necessarily disagree with them, but seemed to deduce for himself the political reason for settling Athenians there, unless it was from Ephorus or another source. Stadter gives credence to Plutarch's interpretation, noting one reason for the settlement would have been 'to provide land and living space for those dispossessed by the invasion of Attica.'⁵¹⁵ Plutarch's subsequent clause 'for the Aeginetans he drove out entirely' (Αἰγινήτας γὰρ ἐξέλασας ἅπαντας) is a paraphrase from Thucydides (ἀνέστησαν δὲ καὶ Αἰγινήτας τῷ αὐτῷ θερεὶ τούτῳ ἐξ Αἰγίνης), omitting the 'summer' timeframe. Thucydides' explanations being skipped over, he held on to the statement of the sending of colonists shortly afterward. He did not say they were sent out, as Thucydides did, but focused on what would have happened before that – dividing

⁵¹³ Stadter 1989:314.

⁵¹⁴ Thuc. 2.27.1.

⁵¹⁵ Stadter 1989:315.

allotments of land by lot – a clever way of maintaining uniqueness from Thucydides while stating the same event. But there may also be an element of criticism or correction of Thucydides in the term for the settlers. The *History* reads ἐποίκους and οἰκήτορας for ‘colonist.’ Plutarch uses the word κληρουχίας, or cleruchy, which seems to be the more accurate term for citizens who were given newly conquered land without specific organization as a new polis.⁵¹⁶ Further, specific evidence concerning the Athenian settlement of Aegina, some of which Plutarch likely had access to, also suggests it was a cleruchy.⁵¹⁷

What follows is both a historical inference and compression from Thucydides. Plutarch ignores for the time being the eclipse and Athens securing alliances,⁵¹⁸ and moves to material from 2.30-33. Plutarch says the Peloponnesians suffered damage, and this destruction could offer some consolation (παρηγορία) to the Athenians.⁵¹⁹ The expedition ‘ravaged much territory and sacked villages and small cities, while Pericles himself, by land, invaded the Megarid and razed it all.’⁵²⁰ Thus the details and longer narration from Thucydides, such as Athenian attacks on Methone and Peia, victories over the Corinthians, and the Cephallenian tetrapolis are subsumed under a brief description.⁵²¹ This compression is necessary to allow Plutarch to expand on Pericles’ ultimately political responses. Plutarch had given critical thought to the loss the Athenians underwent from the invasion. Thucydides had already given details about how many people came in from the rural communities outside of Athens,⁵²² especially the Acharnians,⁵²³ and Plutarch maintains the problem throughout his narrative of the war. He surely had seen many small villages, being a resident and traveller in Greece, and what the cutting of trees, buildings,

⁵¹⁶ Stadter 1989:138-139, 315.

⁵¹⁷ Stadter 1989:315-316.

⁵¹⁸ Thuc. 2.28-29.

⁵¹⁹ See Stadter 1989:316.

⁵²⁰ *Per.* 34.2.

⁵²¹ Stadter 1989:316.

⁵²² Thuc. 2.14-17.

⁵²³ Thuc. 2.20-21.

and supplies would mean for many people. He therefore draws from this that the people's angst actually was very high, and believed Pericles would have done everything he could to alleviate their suffering and discontent, and the attacks on Sparta helped him politically. At this point, Plutarch skipped over Pericles' funeral oration,⁵²⁴ possibly because it was already so well-known to his audience and he did not feel the need to revisit it.

Plutarch proceeds to build off the successes of the Athenian war effort to show how correct Pericles was, conjecturing that the war would have been over quickly were it not for the δαιμόνιον, referring to the plague, the next section of Thucydides before him. Stadter notes that the word δαιμόνιον is picked up from Thucydides 2.64.1, which is Pericles' speech prior to his dismissal, where he says what is sent from the gods ought to be endured while fighting enemies courageously.⁵²⁵ This speech is considerably ahead of where Plutarch was in the scroll, so this may have been from memory. Additionally, he may have believed Thucydides was accurately representing Pericles' own view of the subject in this case. Plutarch would be inclined to believe this preserved Pericles' attitude, since he would expect as much from the virtuous Pericles, given his own reverence for divine activity. In any case, it was preferable to Thucydides' own more cynical treatment of the gods and the plague. Plutarch saw the plague to be the only reason the plan failed. Indeed, this divine force ruins 'human plans' (ἀνθρωπίνους λογισμοῖς). Since Pericles eventually died from the plague and it weakened Athen's fighting strength,⁵²⁶ this would be the case by default in his mind. Plutarch says the plague destroyed those with 'youth and power,' which fits well with Thucydides' picture of the plague striking even those in good health and strong.⁵²⁷ Plutarch's ἡ λοιμώδης ἐνέπεσε φθορὰ is similar to Thucydides' λοιμὸς οὐδὲ φθορὰ.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁴ Thuc. 2.34-46.

⁵²⁵ Stadter 1989:316.

⁵²⁶ Cf. Thuc. 2.58.

⁵²⁷ Thuc. 2.49.1, 2.51.2.

The next sentence which concludes the chapter describes the plague and anger at Pericles in poetic language, but is based from his general knowledge of Thucydides.⁵²⁹ Thucydides does not even discuss the blame on Pericles until 2.59, though Plutarch is foreshadowing what will happen later. His use of imagery of being a doctor shows again the influence of philosophical study on his understanding of history, since it is a common Platonic device for the knowledgeable statesman.⁵³⁰

Chapter 35: Pericles falls to fortune

For this chapter, Plutarch has moved to the next section in Thucydides, 2.56, concerning the next expedition. Thucydides says that Pericles was still judging that Athens should not march out to battle, but organized a force of one hundred ships, including specially modified ships for holding horses, four thousand hoplites and three hundred cavalry. He notes that fifty ships from Chios and Lesbos joined them as well. Plutarch summarizes this, adding the ship numbers together to ‘one hundred fifty’ and ‘many’ hoplites and cavalry.⁵³¹ However, Plutarch assigns two additional motives to Pericles. First, he states that Pericles wanted to ‘heal’ these problems (Ταῦτα βουλόμενος ἰᾶσθαι). This goes along with his Platonic political image of the doctor, and perhaps suggests that Pericles was acting to alleviate the plague. Since Ταῦτα is plural and has no object, the referents are to the previous paragraph, which gave the claim that the plague was caused by the crowding into the city, the country men having no employment and filling each other with corruption, with no change or relief. Plutarch likely thought there was some truth to this claim, as Stadter says that ‘he himself seems to have associated such diseases with potent

⁵²⁸ Thuc. 2.47.3.

⁵²⁹ Cf. Stadter 1989:318-319, See Thuc. 2.47-54 for the plague description and 2.14 for rural people crowding Athens.

⁵³⁰ Stadter 1989:318.

⁵³¹ *Per.* 35.1

emanations or effluences.’⁵³² Plutarch elsewhere, in noting the measures taken for children whose parents die of dropsy and the spread of this plague from Egypt to Athens, connects contagiousness and proximity, theorizing the spread of disease by its passing from one thing through another.⁵³³ The expedition was therefore a way to get men out of the city and give them something useful to do. The second reason given is to harm (παραλυπεῖν) the enemy. This may harken back to a political as well as military purpose, the idea found previously in 34.2, that what the enemy suffered helped comfort the Athenians. Significantly, this word for harm is found in the *History* 2.51.1, where he says that no disease harmed them besides the plague. Plutarch may have turned this term specifically to show Pericles’ high spirit in planning attacks against the Peloponnese despite being attacked by disease. Plutarch confirms the dual political-military function at the end of the sentence, saying that at the point of launching out it gave ‘great hope to the citizens, and no less fear to the enemy in consequence of so great a force.’⁵³⁴

At this juncture Plutarch departs from Thucydides to give an anecdote told in the philosophical schools in Athens, perhaps one he heard while studying under Ammonius there. Pericles’ lack of superstition in this episode is a major positive example, and implicitly strengthens the link between Pericles and Anaxagoras, who believed eclipses to be natural shadows.⁵³⁵ This story of the eclipse is problematic in its departure from Thucydides, however. Thucydides speaks of an eclipse, not at this point in the narrative, but back in 2.28, which occurred the year before this expedition.

⁵³² Stadter 1989:317.

⁵³³ *Divine Vengeance*, 558E-F.

⁵³⁴ *Per.* 35.1.

⁵³⁵ Stadter 1989:321.

Due to Plutarch's 'working so closely from Thucydides,' Stadter argues, it is 'not simple negligence or ignorance but his method' that brought about the error.⁵³⁶ Stadter proceeds to imagine that Plutarch forgot about the Thucydidean notice of the eclipse from the energy he exerted into the dramatic plague account, and since the anecdote involved some expedition with the fleet, Plutarch may have thought to put it here, sourced either from memory or a separate notebook. Stadter also sees the final λέγεται as a sign of noncommittal to the veracity of the story. However, the question of forgetfulness seems difficult for us to sustain, if Plutarch had the scroll in front of him, and used material in 2.27 nearby, which suggests he saw the eclipse mention. A few more points are in order to suggest that Plutarch did not actually notice it. Thucydides' eclipse section is buried between the Aeginetan issue (2.27) and accounts of new Athenian alliances (2.29). Plutarch only uses the beginning sentence of the Aegina section, that concerning the Athenian settlement of the place. When Thucydides begins stating where the Aeginetans were settled, Plutarch may have immediately turned the scroll ahead to the next section he knew he would use, 2.30-31, which talks of Athenian victories, or he may have written on the Athenian victories from memory upon glancing at what it said, while jumping ahead in the scroll to the plague account, since his 2.30-31 summary is very brief and generalized. Furthermore, Thucydides only mentions the eclipse in two sentences. With so much irrelevant material being skipped over, the smallness of the section, and the awkwardness of using a scroll, perhaps it is plausible that Plutarch simply did not notice it there.

Plutarch then picks up where he left off in Thucydides 2.56 to 2.58.⁵³⁷ Plutarch gave a much more negative presentation of the expedition than Thucydides did, but this is due to his selection of facts to include rather than direct contradiction of Thucydides. Plutarch did not

⁵³⁶ Stadter 1989:320.

⁵³⁷ *Per.* 35.3.

mention the wasting of Troezen, Halieis, or Hermione, or the capture of the coastal town of Prasiae, but only the failed siege of Epidaurus. Plutarch implies that the general failure is based upon his reading of Thucydides, as he says that Pericles ‘seems’ (δοκεῖ) to have accomplished nothing worthy of his preparations (τῆς παρασκευῆς ἄξιον δοῦναι). This phrase itself is an echo of οὔτε τᾶλλα τῆς παρασκευῆς ἀξίως found in Thucydides 2.58.2. He conflates the Epidaurus siege with the reinforcements of Hagnon aiding in the siege of Potidaea, both in the use of this phrase and in the description of the plague, the outbreak of which at Potidaea brought the mission to a close.⁵³⁸ Such conflation was an acceptable procedure for Plutarch, as Pelling’s study shows.⁵³⁹ Plutarch did preserve the main point, that the plague swept the Athenians and their allies. The progressively worse problems Pericles faces are among the themes of these last few chapters of the *Life*, and the presentation of his poor fortune becomes an interpretive focus at this stage.

The *Life* continues in the chronology set by Thucydides by drawing off the next section in 2.59, which sets up Pericles’ assembly speech and the discontent surrounding it. Plutarch says the Athenians were ‘exasperated’ against Pericles ‘on this account,’ therefore he attempted to ‘appease and encourage’ them.⁵⁴⁰ By ‘this account’ Plutarch could mean the general problems they faced, but both the unsuccessful military operations and the plague seem to be the main issues. Thucydides includes these, except Thucydides emphasizes the loss of property from the Peloponnesian advances also, which are not included by Plutarch. As noted above, however, Pericles’ motivation for the expedition was to ‘heal’ the Athenian’s despair in doing damage to the enemy and possibly alleviate the problems of the plague. To this extent, Pericles’ efforts failed, thus the loss of property is simply assumed to be an underlying problem in Plutarch’s

⁵³⁸ Stadter 1989:321.

⁵³⁹ Pelling 2011:91-92.

⁵⁴⁰ *Per.* 35.4.

narrative because it was delineated already in chapter 33. Historiographically, then, there was no need to repeat the property loss here, especially as the focus is on the results of Pericles' expedition and his goals for the expedition. Gomme also notes that the Athenian change of heart against Pericles makes good historical sense during the time of Pericles' lacklustre expedition, providing plenty of fodder for his opponents to attack him in his absence, then upon his return to the city.⁵⁴¹ Plutarch preserved the political angle that Thucydides provided in 2.59 that all of these things together made the people dejected in every way, and therefore attacked Pericles. Plutarch describes the speech of Pericles in terms of 'appeasement' and 'encouragement' which are the main points of the speech as recorded in Thucydides, where he defended himself, pointed out the necessity for themselves to carry on the war, and gave them reasons why they could win and why they were great.⁵⁴²

Plutarch's next sentence overall agrees with the subsequent section in Thucydides, where the people vote to fine him. Plutarch says Pericles was not able to allay their anger (οὐ μὴν παρέλυσσε τὴν ὀργήν), which is from Thucydides 2.65 (ὀργῆς παραλύειν). Plutarch did not include Thucydides' comments that Pericles convinced them to continue the war but that the personal hatred against him remained. This absence is probably because only the anger against Pericles seemed relevant for the theme of Pericles' difficulties, and any other decision Athens made was excluded from the individual focus. There is one notable addition, however. Thucydides 2.65 does not say Pericles was still general or removed from command. On the other hand, Plutarch assumes he was general at this time, and states they voted to strip him of command. In the context of Pericles' last speech back in 2.59, it states Pericles called the assembly 'being still general' which Hornblower says could indicate that Pericles was actually general and removed

⁵⁴¹ Gomme 1956:166.

⁵⁴² Thuc. 2.60-64.

of command at this time, but this cannot be confirmed.⁵⁴³ Nevertheless, Plutarch took it this way, and he may be supported by the fact that later in the *History* (2.65) Pericles was elected general again.⁵⁴⁴

From here, Plutarch uses other sources to discuss Pericles' fines, then his perseverance through his family troubles and deaths in chapter 36. In chapter 37, he returns to Thucydides one more time, though since Thucydides is not significantly used for the rest of the book, he may have said it from memory rather than having the scroll in front of him at this stage of the composition. Plutarch writes that the city 'made trial of its other generals and counsellors for the conduct of the war, but since no one appeared to have weight that was adequate or authority that was competent for such leadership, it yearned for Pericles, and summoned him back to the bema and the war-office.'⁵⁴⁵ This picks up from 2.65.4 of Thucydides, who states that shortly afterwards the people elected him general and gave the affairs of everything back to him. The two reasons Thucydides provides are, firstly, that as time progressed, their personal troubles were felt less severely and secondly, they held Pericles to be the most capable among them. Plutarch has not included the first reason, but expands on the implications of the second. A valid question could be asked of the historical situation: if Pericles was the best man to conduct affairs, what does that say about the other leaders in Athens? The answer must be that they were simply not as capable, and Plutarch felt the freedom to state this. A further support for Plutarch's assumption is from Thucydides 2.65.8-10, which discusses leaders after Pericles and their lack of depth in comparison to Pericles. Since Pericles died in less than a year after his re-election, Plutarch would be justified to think that these men who took over from Pericles after his

⁵⁴³ Hornblower 1991:331.

⁵⁴⁴ Stadter 1989:324. Stadter also suggests the demotion from generalship addition could have been for 'rhetorical effect,' though we are trying to explain Plutarch's writing decisions in terms of historiographical thinking, and these points from Thucydides argue that Plutarch was thinking along those terms.

⁵⁴⁵ *Per.* 37.1.

demotion were the same men who took over after his death. From here, Plutarch leaves Thucydides, and other sources provide the background of his reinstatement, request to allow his son heirship, and his illness and death.

Conclusions on Pericles

From this survey of passages where Thucydides provided the source material for the *Pericles*, we can see a number of patterns and ways in which Plutarch's preservation and inferences from the *History* can be explained by a historiographical approach. Plutarch remains mostly faithful to the Thucydidean record at points regarding the character under examination, chronology of events, facts, and narrative structure. However, at all of these points of agreement he frequently uses synonyms or varied phrasing, or may substitute a Platonic-tinged metaphor for a Thucydidean statement, and shifts material to different places in his narrative according to his own topical themes.

Plutarch's respect for the accuracy of Thucydides' account demonstrates his trust in traditional authorities – certain historical records are simply to be believed. Plutarch had a wide variety of sources on Pericles, many of them from simple recollection, since Plutarch, widely read as he was, had read much of the Greek literature in prior years that mentions Pericles for other reasons.⁵⁴⁶ Much of this literature was far more critical of Pericles than Thucydides was, which challenged Plutarch to fit it all together in some way, such as the evolution of Pericles' political technique and character. Thucydides led Plutarch to weigh the negative evidence as less likely to be historically factual. On the significant body of evidence accusing Pericles of fomenting war for personal reasons, Plutarch concluded that the truth of the claims is not clear.⁵⁴⁷ This sort of statement stems from Plutarch's respect for the grandeur of Pericles'

⁵⁴⁶ Pelling 2011:2.

⁵⁴⁷ *Per.* 32.3.

character, imagined in large part thanks to Thucydides. This is not to say he believed everything in Thucydides without question – he presented some areas of possible disagreement, such as the tone of the success or failure of a campaign or ‘cleruchy’ over ‘colony’ in Aegina.

The divergences from Thucydides can actually be explained by logical deduction from the evidence, interpretations run through a biographical paradigm. Plutarch had his own agenda and did not see the need to replicate Thucydides’ technical terms. His philosophical political perspectives enabled him to draw conclusions of his own from the text. The belief in the incapability of the mob compared to the wisdom of Pericles is presented along Platonic lines, reminiscent of a philosopher-king who knew what was best but was eventually overcome by the irrational passions of the crowd. Plutarch also emphasizes individuals – bringing out Pericles, Kleon, and Archidamus to represent the power behind collective entities. Ethical understandings of action are paramount, as Pericles’ virtues and wisdom are emphasized where appropriate, as well as inferences of how people acted and felt in light of the situation Thucydides presented. Thucydides was asking different questions than Plutarch was asking, but the fact that Plutarch was asking questions of a historical text and reading between its lines shows that his method was historiographical. This is the sort of work historians do.

In response now to some strong wariness towards Plutarch mentioned in the previous chapter, Plutarch’s choices may be dispiriting for the historian whose particular questions about the past are different from those Plutarch was asking. Plutarch gives an indication of historiographical care, and in our own critical handling of ancient texts there is a danger of what Pitcher calls an ‘excess of readerly paranoia’ in studying ancient writers of history.⁵⁴⁸ Plutarch is not oversimplifying matters of historical record if those matters are irrelevant to his own questions. It is permissible in history to summarize and avoid a long excursus, and inevitable that

⁵⁴⁸ Pitcher 2009:125.

ideology would influence treatments of the evidence. Parallelism and the individual perspective need not be considered, as Bosworth says, an ‘element of distortion,’⁵⁴⁹ but rather unique research questions, where Plutarch found a way in which a Greek and Roman were similar and followed the trail to find any other areas of similarity that writers with other questions may have missed. As Pitcher comments again, ‘Selectivity, it is worth stressing, is not always tantamount to suppression.’⁵⁵⁰ There is the potential for distortion and suppression of inconvenient facts, but not necessarily more than any other research question, and it could just as well be seen, from Plutarch’s point of view, as an opportunity for further reflection and understanding of the past and its relevance for improving the readers. Even the universal historian Polybius emphasized important individuals and freely embedded parallelisms, as when he compared the good generalship of Hannibal and Epameinondas against hard fortune.⁵⁵¹

That rhetoric, poetry, and drama influenced Plutarch’s language is not in doubt, but we have seen ways in which Plutarch’s interpretive decisions can be explained specifically by historiography. In light of studies of modern scholarship by Pelling and others noted above in Chapter 2 where Plutarch exemplifies a careful interpreter of history in many other cases, this would be the best way to take these passages rather than the reductionism of rhetorical or dramatic effects. His views of classical authority, political paradigms, Platonism, critical questioning of sources, logical inferences, ethics, and piety combined into a model of historiographical interpretation. We will explore some of these themes in the next chapter on Nicias, and see other examples of Plutarch’s philosophy aiding him in historiographical method for the *Lives*.

⁵⁴⁹ Bosworth 1992:79.

⁵⁵⁰ Pitcher 2009:125.

⁵⁵¹ *Histories* 9.8-9.10.

CHAPTER 4: Thucydides in Plutarch's *Life of Nicias*

Thucydides was undoubtedly in front of Plutarch during his composition of the *Nicias*,⁵⁵² as we presupposed for *Pericles*. *Nicias* is dependent upon Thucydides for material because *Nicias* was more obscure, and fewer sources on him survived for Plutarch to access, though the mention of Philistus and Timaeus implies that he could take some material from them.⁵⁵³ For this reason, most of the work is basically material from Thucydides, which has given *Nicias* some scholarly attention in discussions of how Plutarch used Thucydides.⁵⁵⁴ Littman has already given a basic survey of Plutarch's use of Thucydides for *Nicias*.⁵⁵⁵ For this reason and due to space constraints, there will not be a complete survey of all of Plutarch's quotations from Thucydides. Rather, this will be a more generalized examination, selecting a handful of significant usages based upon three criteria: selections that show the same methods as performed in *Pericles*, passages that have received scholarly attention regarding Plutarch's use of Thucydides, or passages that show examples of a character-theory of historical interpretation, of which *Nicias* is a sharper example than *Pericles*.

Nicias required a different methodological approach from the *Pericles*, since the lack of historical material about *Nicias* left Thucydides to be his main source. Plutarch's efforts to discover the character of *Nicias* and to draw every detail he could out of his limited sources provides an opportunity that *Pericles* did not afford us as much. It allows us to explore Plutarch's idea of character types, another aspect of Plutarch's interpretive paradigm. Pelling has given studies on Plutarch's 'character theory,' and the level of his correspondence to the theory in practice, but considerable work remains to show that character theory is a historiographical

⁵⁵² Pelling 2011:119.

⁵⁵³ See Pelling 2011:118-9 for non-Thucydidean sources for *Nicias*.

⁵⁵⁴ For example, Pelling 2011:117-141, de Romilly 1988, Nikolaidis 1988, Littman 1970:181-255.

⁵⁵⁵ Littman 1970:181-255.

method, a way of gaining further insight into the past.⁵⁵⁶ Plutarch believed in the possibility of change in character, as noted in Chapter 2, but he also had an idea of predictable, more static characters. The Peripatos systematized character types, the most notable example today being Theophrastus' descriptions of stock characters, of which 'the superstitious man' is one.⁵⁵⁷ Plutarch was aware of Theophrastus and cited him fairly frequently in his writings.⁵⁵⁸ He may not have attributed the extreme caricature of the superstitious man drawn by Theophrastus to Nicias, but he did consider it a type, as is evident from his essay on superstition.⁵⁵⁹ There is also a type of the 'cautious general' that Plutarch believed existed, as we know from *Aratus* 10, and it is in this category that Plutarch considers Nicias to be.⁵⁶⁰ The signature move of such generals is a hesitancy to join battle, or perform any risky action, but once the decision is made they are 'swift and effective.'⁵⁶¹ In what follows below, we will expand on this to argue that Plutarch's belief in stable character enabled him to make inferences from Thucydides about what happened.

After commenting on Plutarch's overall use of Thucydides for *Nicias*, we will examine whether Plutarch's view of the character of Nicias was framed by Thucydides. Then, we will observe how Plutarch's historically-informed beliefs about the characters in Thucydides' narrative shape his interpretations of the evidence in the case of Nicias, Kleon, and the Athenian people. From here, a study will be undertaken regarding Plutarch's use of Thucydides regarding the initial foray towards Sicily and a defense of Plutarch's historiographical interest. Lastly, we will discover ways in which Plutarch's idea of character enable him to make historiographical inferences from the Thucydidean record.

⁵⁵⁶ See Pelling 2011:102-108.

⁵⁵⁷ See Diggle 2004.

⁵⁵⁸ Littman 1970:179.

⁵⁵⁹ 164E-F.

⁵⁶⁰ Pelling 2011:120.

⁵⁶¹ Pelling 2011:120.

Plutarch and Thucydides in Nicias

In the prologue of *Nicias*, Plutarch makes some interesting statements about Thucydides and historiography. Upon introducing Nicias and Sicily as the proper parallel to Crassus and the Parthian disaster, there is a declaration of methodology and modesty. Unlike the arrogant Timaeus, he will not compete with Thucydides, who even surpassed himself in ‘pathos, vividness, and variety’ and cannot be matched.⁵⁶² Plutarch shows his respect for classical authorities: they cannot be improved upon, and those who try to compete with them or reduce them are wrong. Yet while disavowing jealous competition with other writers and attempts to imitate the inimitable classical masters,⁵⁶³ Plutarch must still make his work necessary and original. Plutarch does not separate his account from any sense of the historicity of Thucydides’ narratives. Rather, as Pelling points out, in this prologue it is the ‘artistic qualities’ in Thucydides that Plutarch commends and refuses to vie with.⁵⁶⁴ This is the opposite of what we would expect if Plutarch’s main method aim was to create exciting, rather than factual, stories about the hero. It is Thucydides who has the exciting narrative that Plutarch refuses to compete with, but he can add additional facts about Nicias that were not known to his readers before.

Plutarch presents a two-pronged approach.⁵⁶⁵ First, he cannot ignore the events included in Thucydides and Philistus because they indicate the nature and disposition of the man (τὸν τρόπον καὶ τὴν διάθεσιν τοῦ ἀνδρὸς) under his many sufferings, but must include them briefly, without unnecessary detail. Second, he aims to include other details which have other writers have missed, incidental mentions in other texts or inscriptions and decrees that are relevant to character and temperament. Pelling observes that this search for other data shows a ‘serious

⁵⁶² *Nic.* 1.1-2. Plutarch is referring here to the story of Sicily in Thucydides Book 7, which is especially well-narrated relative to the rest of his *History*.

⁵⁶³ *Nic.* 1.4.

⁵⁶⁴ Pelling 2011:117.

⁵⁶⁵ *Nic.* 1.5.

historical enquiry committed to the truth, especially (in this case) when the truth goes beyond Thucydides.⁵⁶⁶ We see a concern here for the facts, and facts that contribute to understanding the real Nicias for the benefit of his audience.

It is significant that knowledge of Thucydides is assumed of the audience.⁵⁶⁷ In quoting from obscure sources, the audience would likely be unaware of how he represented them, but any departures from Thucydides would be noticed. Plutarch would know that any error he made could be noticed by the audience. This is one argument to avoid explaining Plutarch's differences from Thucydides as carelessness, rhetorical exaggeration, or fictionalizing. We should be careful to note that a departure from Thucydides which may seem to be a contradiction to us, would not be unexpected in Plutarch's milieu.

The assessment of Nicias by Thucydides and Plutarch

We will begin our study of *Nicias* with the same initial question as was stated for *Pericles*. Was Plutarch's view of the character of Nicias influenced by Thucydides, and did they share the same basic assessment of this man? Thucydides seems to present a positive view of Nicias. Although Westlake has argued that Thucydides is not prejudiced either way, he at least serves as a flawed protagonist.⁵⁶⁸ The complexity of Thucydides' presentation of Nicias will be noted further below, but his assessment of Nicias at his death in 7.86 carries the most weight as far as overall judgment on his character. Thucydides transcends his usually staid narrative to say that Nicias 'was a man who, of all the Hellenes in my time, least deserved to come to so miserable an end, since the whole of his life had been devoted to the study and practice of virtue.'⁵⁶⁹ Thucydides has given the most basic assessment needed for Plutarchan biography: the

⁵⁶⁶ Pelling 2011:117.

⁵⁶⁷ Duff 2011:250.

⁵⁶⁸ Westlake 1941, and he states in 1968:86 that his views had not fundamentally changed.

⁵⁶⁹ Thuc. 7.86. Warner trans.

man had virtue. However, the errors Nicias committed, which Thucydides records also, were severe, and related to his characteristic lack of ‘boldness, enterprise, and energy,’ as Westlake comments.⁵⁷⁰ The kinds of errors Nicias made, along with his weaker character qualities, were very serious when seen through the prism of Plutarch’s philosophical system, and Plutarch voices criticism of Nicias throughout the biography.

For this reason, scholars are divided whether or not Plutarch presents Nicias as a hero or an unworthy character.⁵⁷¹ Nikolaidis argues that overall Plutarch presents Nicias negatively, choosing critical presentations of Nicias when more positive directions were available, placing Nicias implicitly in the category of Alcibiades, Antony and others who were *bios* examples to avoid.⁵⁷² Plutarch makes very sharp judgments on Nicias for being superstitious, cowardly, timid, and ostentatious, and for many of his foolish actions, such as yielding his command to Kleon, being too cautious on the Sicilian campaign, or halting the march out of Syracuse in fear of the eclipse. Nikolaidis further contends that many of Plutarch’s deductions from Thucydides spin a much more negative picture than Thucydides gives, such as attributing Nicias’ success as a general to fortune, which is not at all what Thucydides says.⁵⁷³

Some of the more detailed inferences will be examined better below, but it is important to first highlight Plutarch’s ideological reasons for blaming Nicias. Plutarch’s love of Athens and strong stance on the destructiveness of superstition would make the study of Nicias a particularly painful one. Plutarch condemns superstition rather intensely in this essay on the subject, calling superstition impiety, because it charges gods with evil,⁵⁷⁴ and leads to atheism.⁵⁷⁵ He further argues that superstition is worse than atheism, because it involves fear, and the belief that the

⁵⁷⁰ Westlake 1968:210.

⁵⁷¹ Duff 1999:56.

⁵⁷² Nikolaidis 1988:319-333.

⁵⁷³ Nikolaidis 1988:320.

⁵⁷⁴ 169.

⁵⁷⁵ 171A-B.

divinities mean harm rather than good for people, which is actually an insult to them.⁵⁷⁶ Nicias even makes an appearance in the piece: Plutarch declares that if Nicias had removed superstition from himself regarding the eclipse, ‘it would perhaps have been the best thing in the world.’⁵⁷⁷ He ends the essay with a strong statement that ‘there is no infirmity comprehending such a multitude of errors and emotions, and involving opinions so contradictory, or rather antagonistic’ than superstition.⁵⁷⁸ Any strong statements in Plutarch’s rhetorical pieces should be taken with caution, as they may go farther on one side of any issue for the sake of argument.⁵⁷⁹ However, it is clear that Plutarch did consider superstition very harmful, and it shows in *Nicias*. As we saw from the prologue, Thucydides’ presentation of the Sicilian expedition was particularly admired by Plutarch, making the story all the more poignant to him. The errors that led to the needless destruction of the finest Athenian force would have irritated the Athens-admiring Plutarch. This explains a harsh tint of his criticisms of Nicias.

However, there are reasons to question whether *Nicias* is meant to show a completely undesirable character, or that Plutarch was unfair to Nicias, as his text and Plutarch’s philosophy once again make clear. Nicias is commended in many of his actions, and sometimes Plutarch is more generous than Thucydides in his appraisal.⁵⁸⁰ Nicias is presented as supporting and actively procuring peace with Sparta and restoration of friendliness in Greece,⁵⁸¹ and the *synkrisis* lists this as a godlike quality of Nicias.⁵⁸² It was a very positive aspect for Plutarch, as harmony and

⁵⁷⁶ 164E-165B.

⁵⁷⁷ 169A.

⁵⁷⁸ 171E.

⁵⁷⁹ See Hubert 1997:715-733 for Plutarch’s rhetoric.

⁵⁸⁰ Pelling 2011:120 thinks Nicias coming out of sickbed to direct action is one such case of Plutarch’s inference (*Nic.* 18.1). See also Pelling 2011:137.

⁵⁸¹ *Nic.* 9.

⁵⁸² *Nic.—Cras Syn.* 2.5.

Greek unity held exalted positions within his thought,⁵⁸³ and the breakdown of the ‘Peace of Nicias’ was a turning point towards the worst in Greek disunity. In fact, in another *Life* Plutarch includes Nicias in a list of ‘great warriors’ who had fought for the liberty of Greece.⁵⁸⁴ Nicias is called a ‘good and moderate man’ for not becoming caught up in the wave of excitement for the Sicilian expedition, even if his stubborn reluctance later was inopportune.⁵⁸⁵ Pelling comments that Plutarch is more critical of the Athenian demos than of Nicias, indicating that Nicias had some plausible reasons to be nervous and afraid of them.⁵⁸⁶ His selfless effort in caring for the men on the bitter retreat from Syracuse is also commended.⁵⁸⁷ The *synkrisis* at the end criticizes Nicias harshly against Crassus on some points, but criticizes Crassus equally harshly against Nicias on others, and gives strong praise of him as well.⁵⁸⁸

There are likewise subtler hints of positive evaluations of Nicias. At the start of the *Life*, he notes Aristotle’s statement that Nicias was among the three best Athenian politicians, alongside Thucydides son of Melesias and Theramenes.⁵⁸⁹ He then says that Theramenes of the three was actually not as good as Nicias and Thucydides son of Melesias, then that Thucydides was part of the aristocratic party that opposed Pericles previously. Knowing Plutarch’s admiration for Pericles, this probably places Nicias at the top of the three. The historical situation in Athens at this time indicated a lack of wisdom and political merit in general. As we saw in *Pericles*, Plutarch probably considered Athens to be in overall decline after the death of Pericles. This is the generation that condemned Socrates after all. Therefore, in this post-Periclean period,

⁵⁸³ Duff 1999:89. Marincola 2010:121-143 demonstrates that the major theme in all of Plutarch’s *Lives* about the men in the Persian Wars is Greek cooperation.

⁵⁸⁴ *Flam.* 11.3-7. The warriors in this list are also said to have not known how to use their victories, but the commendation remains.

⁵⁸⁵ *Nic.* 14.1-2.

⁵⁸⁶ Pelling 2011:137 n. 28. A strong support for this is after Alcibiades’ sabotage of the peace Nicias brokered, where the life of Nicias was in danger. See *Nic.* 10.7.

⁵⁸⁷ *Nic.* 26.4-27.1.

⁵⁸⁸ See especially *Nic—Cras. Syn.* 1.1, 2.5, and 4.1.

⁵⁸⁹ *Nic.* 2.1-2.

Nicias is presented to be the better man than the demos and the other Athenian leaders, especially Alcibiades.⁵⁹⁰ This means that Plutarch would likely have agreed with Thucydides' assessment that Nicias, of all the other Hellenes of his era, least deserved his awful fate. Nicias was simply one of the best that could be had at the time, though certainly not as great as a Pericles or Aristides.

Nicias had a mix of good and bad qualities, and Plutarch highlighted the bad qualities for didactic reasons, as they were considered deadly philosophically. The faults of Nicias were serious and important to avoid, thus it is not surprising that Plutarch would emphasize them. While he detested superstition, he could be understanding of weakness, or in the case of Nicias, ignorance.⁵⁹¹ As Pelling observes, Plutarch desired 'ethical generosity in treating human weakness.'⁵⁹² Although Nikolaidis argues that Plutarch was not displaying his characteristic generosity for Nicias,⁵⁹³ Plutarch's praise of Nicias should not be taken lightly, even if balanced by perhaps unfair criticism, which itself might stem from frustration with Nicias more than actual condemnation. Our view is that Plutarch shares Thucydides' judgment that Nicias was virtuous, but interpreting the events and actions through his philosophical paradigms, he explicitly criticizes certain blameworthy aspects of Nicias more than Thucydides did.⁵⁹⁴

Characterization of Nicias, Kleon, and the demos

The assembly meeting concerning Pylos in *Nic.* 7 provides a particularly good opportunity to explore Plutarch's characterization methods in historical interpretation. Gathering from the material in Thucydides, Plutarch constructs a significant picture of the character of Nicias, Kleon, and the people. A summary of the situation is provided beforehand – Pylos was

⁵⁹⁰ See *Nic.* 9-10.

⁵⁹¹ Plutarch notes that Nicias simply did not know the true nature of eclipses, because Anaxagoras' theory was only spread among a select few scholars (*Nic.* 23.2).

⁵⁹² Pelling 2011:374.

⁵⁹³ Nikolaidis 1988:319.

⁵⁹⁴ This view is taken by Littman 1970:249-255.

under siege, but it was more time-consuming and unmanageable than expected because they were not able to defeat the Spartans and block their supply line, and they feared it would only become worse with the onset of winter.⁵⁹⁵ This is a distillation of Thucydides' own more detailed account of the situation.⁵⁹⁶ The news of the difficulties brought pressure to bear on Kleon when it reached Athens, because he opposed an earlier truce offer that the Athenians were wishing they had accepted at this point.⁵⁹⁷ Regarding the truce, however, Plutarch adds that Kleon had opposed the truce because of his enmity with Nicias who supported it, which Thucydides does not say here, nor in 4.21 where he discussed it.⁵⁹⁸ Plutarch's word for enemy (*ἐχθρὸς*) is used in the equivalent section of Thucydides, except there it is used a few lines down to denote the relationship of Kleon and Nicias at the start of the assembly debate, making this a possible Plutarchan deduction from his knowledge of Kleon's character. Thucydides includes an episode of Kleon questioning the truth of the reports, then withdrawing his questioning when they appointed him to go there and observe, fearing he would have to retract his words or be proven a liar.⁵⁹⁹ Plutarch omits that episode, but moves on to create a picture of the assembly in Athens discussing the issue. Plutarch makes explicit what was more subtle in Thucydides in relating Kleon's attack of Nicias. Thucydides says Kleon pointed at Nicias, adding that he was his opponent (*ἐχθρὸς*), and asserted that if the generals were men they would easily be able to take the island. On the other hand, Plutarch flatly states that Kleon 'laid all the blame' on Nicias himself. This is an inference from Thucydides' parenthesis of Kleon being *ἐχθρὸς* to Nicias. It was clear from the context, for Plutarch, that this was what Kleon was really doing, rather than pointing to Nicias as merely representative of all of the generals involved.

⁵⁹⁵ *Nic.* 7.1-2.

⁵⁹⁶ *Thuc.* 4.26. to 4.27.1.

⁵⁹⁷ *Nic.* 7.2, *Thuc.* 4.27.3.

⁵⁹⁸ Pelling 2011:151.

⁵⁹⁹ *Thuc.* 4.27.3.

As the episode continues de Romilly notices three interesting differences between their accounts.⁶⁰⁰ First, Plutarch turns the report-style of Thucydides into direct speech. De Romilly passes over this fact without much comment, but it would seem Plutarch is trying to relate a familiar event in a fresh way for his audience. This is a reconstruction of a historical event, bringing the audience of the *Life* even closer to the situation by recreating it in their imagination, as dialogue brings more immediacy to the story. The second difference is the assignment of motives, where de Romilly observes that Thucydides wrote six lines regarding the motives of Kleon and his demagoguery, but Plutarch did not discuss even one of them.⁶⁰¹ When Nicias offers Kleon the command, and the crowd urges him until he takes it, de Romilly posits that Plutarch gives a ‘psychological and moral’ explanation and Thucydides an ‘intellectual explanation’ for Kleon’s decision.⁶⁰² Thucydides says that Kleon had no other way out if he were to remain consistent with what he had said, but Plutarch says his ambition was incited and on fire. Was Kleon trapped, or did he snatch up the opportunity?

This difference can be explained by Plutarch’s character theory and his idea of historical causation. Drawing from Thucydides, comic poets, and other sources, Plutarch knows Kleon as a pandering demagogue. Plutarch had a well-developed idea (and dislike) of this type of character. Plutarch upheld the ideal statesman, the *politicos*, as the wise middle between two other extreme categories of leaders – the demagogue and the tyrant.⁶⁰³ The tyrant may deceive or terrify people with power to gain more power, but the demagogue deceives in another way, by flattery.⁶⁰⁴ In his essay on flattery, he defines flatterers to be unsound in character, those who change themselves

⁶⁰⁰ De Romilly 1988:30-31.

⁶⁰¹ De Romilly 1988:30.

⁶⁰² De Romilly 1988:31.

⁶⁰³ Wardman 1974:49-56.

⁶⁰⁴ Wardman 1974:53-4.

according to whoever they are trying to flatter.⁶⁰⁵ Demagogues were flatterers of the masses, which Plutarch believed especially disgraceful.⁶⁰⁶

In fact, Plutarch's entire conception of the demagogue character type may have been largely developed from exposure to writing about Kleon, especially from Aristophanes.⁶⁰⁷ Kleon makes a frequent appearance in the *History* as well, pushing some kind of agitation, which itself was enough to give Plutarch a robust sense of his status as an unvirtuous demagogue.⁶⁰⁸ Kleon was always appealing to the baser desires of the people, and asserting his own ascendancy, a combination that made it historically obvious to Plutarch that Kleon opposed the truce with Sparta for his animosity with Nicias,⁶⁰⁹ as was noted above. It would also explain his reading of Kleon accepting command out of ambition. Plutarch does not necessarily disagree with Thucydides that Kleon was forced into it – Plutarch implies as much when he relates that Kleon kept refusing the call. But his entrapment must have included an ambitious motive as well, especially judging from his boast of not fearing the Spartans and taking a small force immediately after accepting the command in Thucydides 4.28.3. Therefore an 'intellectual' versus 'psychological' idea in Thucydides and Plutarch may not be the best description of the two authors, as they are both presenting the same demagogue except Plutarch has made further deductions based upon this understanding of Kleon's character. In any case, character theory aided in Plutarch's historical reasoning. Further, in Plutarch's historical understanding of Athens and of the merits of Nicias, a destructive Kleon with certain motives of personal ambition is more significant than the motives Thucydides lists. Kleon gaining authority and influence

⁶⁰⁵ *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*, 51A-53B.

⁶⁰⁶ Duff 1999:119.

⁶⁰⁷ Duff 1999:303.

⁶⁰⁸ Cf. Thuc. 3.36-40, 4.22.

⁶⁰⁹ That Nicias and Kleon were the primary political rivalry in Athens at the time may also lie behind that assumption. See *Nic.* 2.1-2.

opened the floodgates of political turmoil and confusion in Athens, and it was this very episode that brought Kleon to greater power in the city.⁶¹⁰

The third difference de Romilly sees is in the Athenian response to Kleon accepting command in the way that he did. Thucydides says the Athenians laughed at Kleon's boast of taking the place in twenty days, and the wise men were glad that they would either rid themselves of Kleon or would have the place taken.⁶¹¹ De Romilly comments that Plutarch left out the wise people's opinion but emphasizes the laughter, adding the adjective μέγα and adding it was 'an agreeable game' which highlights the more serious tone of Thucydides who connected this event with the future misfortune.⁶¹²

This comment is insightful on more subdued and serious tendencies in Thucydides' work. However, it does not seem to get across the Thucydidean vein Plutarch is using. He is not obligated to replicate the precise tone of Thucydides to practice good historiography, as historians would find ways to be faithful to the spirit of the work while looking at it in a different way.⁶¹³ While the additions could be seen as artistic license, there are points from Thucydides' text Plutarch could have pulled from. The wise men, who Plutarch does not name, were glad (ἀσμένους) that Kleon was leaving, which could add to the happiness of the joke. However, this word often appears in classical literature in the context of relief rather than levity.⁶¹⁴ A more likely option is deduction from the nature of the crowd, which is a major theme in both passages. Thucydides described the prodding of Kleon 'as the crowd was apt to do' (οἷον ὄχλος φιλεῖ ποιεῖν). Plutarch is also operating within the characterization of the crowd. What would the crowd do in this situation? The answer entirely depends on how humorous or outlandish Kleon

⁶¹⁰ *Nic.* 8.3.

⁶¹¹ *Thuc.* 28.5.

⁶¹² De Romilly 1988:31.

⁶¹³ Marincola 1997:13-14.

⁶¹⁴ Liddell and Scott.

is. Plutarch probably took that it was very much so, for at least two reasons. First, Plutarch is making a general statement of the people's opinions of Kleon at this point, that they were already accustomed to his κουφότητα, which is a play off of Thucydides' κουφολογία, or thoughtless talking. Plutarch is actually giving an argument here. Second, there is evidence at this stage of Kleon's career of the people's awareness of Kleon's antics. Immediately following this episode, Plutarch illustrates his argument with an anecdote of Kleon's adjournment of the waiting assembly for the day because he was busy, which also brought laughter. Thus, Plutarch has extended Thucydides' ideas of Kleon's character, as well as the character of the crowd. Kleon's antics are absurd, and the crowd by nature seeks entertainment and teasing.

In *Nicias*, the Athenians as a collective entity play an important singular character. Plutarch had a universal viewpoint about the common people, regardless of what society was under discussion: Plutarch's simplistic application of classical views of the people onto Rome has been noted,⁶¹⁵ and he does this for Greek *Lives* as well. Saïd points out Plutarch's Platonic background for his concepts of the people, as in the *Republic* and *Laws* the masses of the city are representative of the irrational, appetitive part of the soul.⁶¹⁶ Saïd likewise argues that Plutarch portrays the people in his *Lives* as being led by their desires and passions, using many of the same words Plato used in describing them.⁶¹⁷ We have seen this in the *Pericles*, where Pericles went along with the people's desires until he gained enough power to exert his own reasoned plans over them, making him equivalent to the rational part of the soul.⁶¹⁸ The contrast with Pericles then in *Nicias* would be all the more apparent, as Nicias, the wiser man in the city, was

⁶¹⁵ Pelling 2011:212.

⁶¹⁶ Saïd 2005:13-14.

⁶¹⁷ Saïd 2005:14.

⁶¹⁸ Saïd 2005:14.

not capable of controlling the people or outmaneuvering his demagogue opponents, Alcibiades and Kleon.

The people are also an avenue of character pronouncement upon Nicias. Plutarch often does not give his own judgment of Nicias about some action, but includes what the demos thought about it.⁶¹⁹ This tack is used for an early evaluation of the character of Nicias in 2.3-4, where Nicias was put forward to lead the rich, but the common people also appreciated him to be set up against Kleon's buffoonery, and they liked that he was timid and afraid of them. After Kleon's successful capture of Pylos, Nicias was discredited and ridiculed for giving his command to Kleon, as Plutarch understood from Aristophanes' play.⁶²⁰ The peace Nicias negotiated brought him respect and praise from everyone, and Plutarch discusses at length what people were saying about him for this,⁶²¹ though later they were angry with him when the war re-engaged and so many prisoners had been restored to Sparta.⁶²² The pact between Nicias and Alcibiades to ostracize Hyperbolus was amusing at first, but then scorned by the people, which Plutarch uses as a springboard for discussing ostracism and its purpose, and a meditation about the fate of Nicias' decision regarding the ostracism vote.⁶²³ Thus, the people provide both information to highlight character traits about Nicias and also an indirect evaluation mechanism in the narrative.

The invasion of Sicily provides the clearest examples of Plutarch's characterization of the demos. Alcibiades is presented as stirring Athens with excitement for involvement in Sicily before the assembly had met.⁶²⁴ This fits with Plutarch's characterization of the masses as

⁶¹⁹ See Duff 1999:55 for use of 'onlookers' in Plutarch's work.

⁶²⁰ *Nic.* 8.1-2.

⁶²¹ *Nic.* 9.6-7.

⁶²² *Nic.* 10.7-8.

⁶²³ *Nic.* 11.5-7.

⁶²⁴ *Nic.* 12.1.

passive and being acted upon by an outside force, usually a political leader.⁶²⁵ Plutarch includes an image of ‘youth in their training-schools and the old men in their work-shops and lounging-places’ sitting together drawing maps of Sicily and surrounding regions in thoughts of conquering the Western Mediterranean.⁶²⁶ Plutarch emphasizes also their stubbornness in voting on the expedition. The pleas of Nicias only serve to harden them to his advice, and paradoxically convince them they ought to invade Sicily and appoint Nicias general in the expedition he so strongly opposes, in hopes that he would provide balance to the other generals.⁶²⁷ In chapter 13, where the omens and oracles regarding the expedition are discussed, Plutarch comments, ‘no signs could deter the people from the expedition, where they ever so obvious and clear.’⁶²⁸ By Plutarch’s philosophy, the irrational demos would do anything when their passions were so stirred, and this becomes a mechanism of explanation for the history surrounding the hero of the *Life*.

The generals’ debate – compression and characterization in chapter 14

The difference of opinion among the Athenian generals of *Nicias* chapter 14, taken from 6.47-50 in the *History*, has been given as an example of Plutarch distorting a situation beyond the limit of proper historiography, thus it deserves our attention. Thucydides begins his account of the situation by having the three generals meeting together while the fleet was at Rhegium. They had just received word that Egesta could not give the funds they had promised, and that Rhegium would not ally with them in their campaign in Sicily.⁶²⁹ Therefore, Nicias, Alcibiades, and Lamachos held council on what to do given these discouraging circumstances: Nicias that they should sail around Sicily to make a statement of power and return to Athens, Alcibiades that they

⁶²⁵ See Saïd 2005:17.

⁶²⁶ *Nic.* 12.1. This is parallel with Thuc. 6.1.1, but it may also be from Timaeus. See Littman 1970:182-183.

⁶²⁷ *Nic.* 12.3-4.

⁶²⁸ *Nic.* 13.2.

⁶²⁹ Thuc. 6.46.

should foment revolt in the cities then attack Selinus and Syracuse, and Lamachos that they should head for Syracuse and fight as soon as possible, because it would terrify the enemy immediately and give the most chance of victory.⁶³⁰

Regarding Plutarch's redaction of this passage, de Romilly writes that while Plutarch's compression of the episode is understandable for a biography, it is divergent enough from Thucydides to make it 'question of mere fact.'⁶³¹ Plutarch reverses the order of the opinions of the generals. Thucydides lists the generals and their advice to be Nicias, Alcibiades, then Lamachos, but Plutarch does the opposite, listing Lamachos, Alcibiades, then Nicias at the end, 'as if Nicias' advice had prevailed.'⁶³² We will argue, however, that it misrepresents Plutarch's usage of Thucydides to say that he altered fact, upon closer examination of what Plutarch was actually doing.

Chapter 14 is not episodic or chronological, but a general statement about Nicias in the first phase of the expedition. Plutarch sets up the discussion in a very different way: in his previous chapter, the force was still in Athens, and he is covering ground very quickly. There is no description of the launch of the fleet itself or the debates in Syracuse or itinerary of the Athenian fleet as Thucydides had included, since they contain more detail than his narrative requires. Thucydides devotes 6.30-52, a very large section, to the fleet's departure and subsequent events before coming to Sicily, and it would have been a challenge to merely retell the narrative with a drastic word cut. Instead, after talking about the ill-omen of the men departing during a festival from non-Thucydidean sources,⁶³³ Plutarch embarks on character analysis. He discusses the merits of Nicias' wisdom and honesty in opposing the expedition, but

⁶³⁰ Thuc. 6.47-49.

⁶³¹ De Romilly 1988:32.

⁶³² De Romilly 1988:32.

⁶³³ *Nic.* 13.7.

criticizes the hesitancy and caution that would mark this campaign, ‘gazing homewards from his ship like a child, and many times resuming and dwelling on the thought that the people had not yielded to his reasonings, till he took the edge and zeal of his colleagues in command and lost the fittest time for action.’⁶³⁴ There is no time-element at this point, but he observes that Nicias’ actions affected the others negatively.

The very next sentence states the opinions of the three generals, but there are important things to note in the way Plutarch relates this. The sentence begins with *ὁ δέ*, a simple contrastive. There is no indicator here of time, place, situation, or causation in which these opinions were expressed, or any idea of one specific war council even being held. He states the opinions of Lamachos and Alcibiades, then the proposal of Nicias, ending with a declaration of the depressive effect his proposal had upon the men.⁶³⁵ Plutarch expresses the opinions of the generals only in the context of making a point about Nicias and the results of his words. It would seem then that Plutarch is not changing the facts as to how the council ended, because there is no ‘council.’ Therefore, neither is there a vote in which Lamachos went with Alcibiades’ plan to break the deadlock. Rather, Plutarch was stating the simple opinions of each general on what to do, with the emphasis that Nicias’ lack of rigor was bad for morale. The text does not state what decision was taken at this point, but that the advice of Nicias discouraged the men, which is an idea Plutarch repeats in this chapter twice.⁶³⁶

Plutarch continues moving in circles in this chapter. After the opinions of the three generals, he relates that when Alcibiades was recalled, Nicias held sole command and was idle (14.3-4), then gives an episode of Alcibiades while he was still with the fleet sailing for Syracuse and the possible omen of the captured ship (14.5-6) before repeating again that after this

⁶³⁴ *Nic.* 14.2.

⁶³⁵ *Nic.* 14.3.

⁶³⁶ *Nic.* 14.3 and 14.4.

Alcibiades left and Nicias held sole command (15.1). It may also be noted that Plutarch's audience, if the prologue is any indication, already knew Thucydides and would not take Plutarch to mean that there was a particular three-general council where Nicias forced his opinion. Westlake points out that the function of this episode for Thucydides is to demonstrate the disunity among the generals, and also to show that the plan of Alcibiades was not fully implemented; both Nicias and Lamachos each followed their own plans to some degree.⁶³⁷

The omission of Alcibiades' plan would fit into acceptable practice for historical summary. Plutarch does not give an account of the various minor incidents that took place with Alcibiades still present, sailing around to cities in alliance attempts.⁶³⁸ If Plutarch had noted that Alcibiades' advice was taken, he would have to break from his historical point of Nicias' character, and also would need to explain what the fleet did to follow Alcibiades' advice before his recall, which is also irrelevant. If the other omissions of the fleet at Rhegium or delegations to Catana are acceptable practice for historiography, would it be any more misleading to omit that before Nicias' caution prevailed, they followed Alcibiades' plan for a short and unproductive time? This seems to be a case of summarizing rather than actually altering the facts.

Characterization of Nicias: superstitious and cautious general.

Actions after the recall of Alcibiades provide very good examples of Plutarch's characterization method of interpreting history, especially for Nicias in his caution as a general and his superstition. Plutarch had already given attention to both attributes. In chapter 4 he cited Thucydides to say that Nicias was overly inclined towards divination, and provided some other source material to that regard. After discussing the caution of Nicias in dealings with the

⁶³⁷ See Westlake 1968:175 and Littman 1970:247.

⁶³⁸ Thuc. 6.50-52.

demos,⁶³⁹ in chapter 6 Plutarch explains his caution as a general. Knowing how merciless the people could be on generals who failed, Nicias avoided difficult expeditions and instead focused on quick forays that carried less risk. Plutarch notes the wisdom of Nicias in doing this, and lists a number of his victories as general. Framing Nicias' character on these points allowed Plutarch to make predictions and inferences from his sources to shed more light on what happened, beyond what Thucydides explicitly states. These two aspects of his character are related and play off each other.

At this point in the *History*, the two Athenian generals divide their forces and took command of each by lot, then sailed along the coast of Sicily with the intention of gathering allies and funds.⁶⁴⁰ Unsuccessful in this effort with Himera, they captured Hyccra and enslaved the people, dealt with allied Egesta and the Sicels, and attempted to capture Hybla but failed as the summer ended. Thucydides in the next chapter proceeds to winter events, the Athenians preparing to attack Syracuse and Syracusan movements.⁶⁴¹ He portrays the Syracusan attitude to be one of growing boldness: 'For after the Athenians had failed to make an immediate attack, as they had first feared and expected they would do, the Syracusans gained confidence with every day that went by.'⁶⁴²

Plutarch compresses this material into chapter 15 with added interpretations of his own. Immediately after noting Alcibiades' departure, he asserts that Nicias was now in command. Already this is a striking divergence from the corresponding passage of Thucydides, which refers to both of the generals doing the actions, with the one exception of naming Nicias as the general

⁶³⁹ *Nic.* 5.

⁶⁴⁰ *Thuc.* 6.62.

⁶⁴¹ *Thuc.* 6.63.

⁶⁴² *Thuc.* 6.63.1.

who sailed to Egesta.⁶⁴³ Littman does not discuss this difference from Thucydides in his own explanation of this section,⁶⁴⁴ though Pelling cites it to say that Plutarch emphasized Nicias' authority.⁶⁴⁵ Pelling suggests this is an inference on Plutarch's part, which we will assume here.⁶⁴⁶ But is there warrant to say that Nicias actually had this authority?

Plutarch thought so, and he argues the point with historical reasoning. Building upon the record of Nicias being affluent, Plutarch contrasts his wealth and prestige with records of Lamachos' poverty, to the extent of charging Athens for his clothes and boots, an idea possibly originating from a comedy, though this is uncertain.⁶⁴⁷ He also gives an anecdote of a younger Nicias offering the older Sophocles the first word in a general's council, which Sophocles rebuffs to say that Nicias is the senior general.⁶⁴⁸ Both stories may sound more dubious to modern scholars, especially with the chronology problems of the Sophocles story, though even Plutarch distances himself from this one with λέγεται.⁶⁴⁹ Plutarch does say that Lamachos was honourable and brave, thus one might wonder why this fact would not argue that Lamachos had an equal role to Nicias. Given Plutarch's views of the flightiness of the Athenian people at this time, he would probably doubt the Athenians would give much weight to bravery over wealthy prestige. Besides his assumption that the richer, more important man of the two would naturally have command, he also bases this in the events. After restating that Lamachos was under Nicias' command, he gives the summary of the *History* regarding the long period of time without a decisive attack and lack of success in fighting.⁶⁵⁰ A deduction that only Nicias and not the daring and determined Lamachos could be responsible for these delays would be fairly easy for him.

⁶⁴³ Thuc. 6.62.4.

⁶⁴⁴ Littman 1970:191-195.

⁶⁴⁵ Pelling 2011:135 n. 14.

⁶⁴⁶ Says Hornblower 2008:461.

⁶⁴⁷ Littman 1970:191.

⁶⁴⁸ *Nic.* 15.2.

⁶⁴⁹ Littman 1970:191-192.

⁶⁵⁰ *Nic.* 15.3.

Lastly, the impression that Nicias held first place to Lamachos is even given by Thucydides.

Hornblower observes, the name ‘Lamachos’ is avoided in Thucydides for the rest of book 6 until the account of his death in 6.101.2.⁶⁵¹

The next section shows Plutarch’s characterization of the cautious Nicias yet more clearly:

[...] using his forces in a cautious and hesitating manner, he first gave the enemy courage by cruising around Sicily as far as possible from them, and then, by attacking the diminutive little city of Hybla, and going off without taking it, he won their utter contempt. Finally, he went back to Catana without effecting anything at all except the overthrow of Hyccara, a barbarian fastness.⁶⁵²

The sailing around Sicily, failure to take little Hybla, return to Catana, and taking Hyccara are all facts from Thucydides.⁶⁵³ Additionally, the disrespect from the enemy is from the *History*, as quoted above, for which Thucydides had given three reasons: the Athenian delay in attacking, the long distance the Athenians placed between them, and the Athenian failure to take Hybla.⁶⁵⁴ Plutarch has essentially repeated the last two reasons, but the first idea on the delay is expanded upon. The phrase of Thucydides in 6.63.2, ‘did not attack them at once’ (οὐκ εὐθὺς ἐπέκειντο) is used twice in 7.42.3 where Demosthenes, representing Thucydides’ own opinion as Hornblower has shown, argues with Nicias that not attacking immediately was a mistake.⁶⁵⁵ Plutarch picks up Thucydides’ criticism of Nicias’ delays by saying he used the forces in a ‘cautious and hesitating manner’ (χρόμενος εὐλαβῶς καὶ διὰ μελλήσεως). Littman comments on this addition that Plutarch ‘is constantly trying to show that Nicias’ weakness was his hesitation, which indeed it was at Syracuse; hence, he is careful to underline this trait where Thucydides leaves it to be

⁶⁵¹ Hornblower 2008:461.

⁶⁵² *Nic.* 15.3.

⁶⁵³ *Thuc.* 6.62.

⁶⁵⁴ *Thuc.* 6.63.

⁶⁵⁵ Hornblower 2008:466.

understood.’⁶⁵⁶ Mere delay is turned into over-wariness and hesitation, which is grounded in both Thucydides’ implications and Plutarch’s characterization of Nicias as a cautious general.

Plutarch continues his narrative in chapter 16, and here Thucydides’ account⁶⁵⁷ meshes with Plutarch’s paradigm of the cautious general turning to brilliant action. Plutarch does not repeat the details of the numerous pages Thucydides occupies on the tactics and battle, but summarizes key points and judgments. In 16.1 there is only one significant addition for our purposes here: Plutarch says that the Syracusan pressure and plan to attack the Athenians made Nicias ‘reluctantly’ sail for Syracuse. This is the pivot for the cautious general – always avoiding action but there comes a point when then the situation compels action. This pivot is covered in Thucydides 6.64.1, but there is no mention of reluctance. Also, the language is of the ‘Athenian generals,’ not Nicias specifically, as once again Plutarch is taking all of the actions of Nicias and Lamachos to mean Nicias as the primary general (though he does not necessarily deny that Lamachos assists and gives counsel). Thucydides relates the plan to send the man from Catana for tricking the Syracusans into marching out and the surprise appearance of the Athenians by the city in 6.64-66, which Plutarch follows closely, though in a shortened version.⁶⁵⁸ Plutarch then pronounces this battle as the best generalship of Nicias in Sicily, giving an abbreviated account of the battle from 6.67-70.⁶⁵⁹ Now that Nicias is committed to action, he would do well. Plutarch adds Nicias cutting bridges afterward and a comment from Hermocrates, which may be from Philistus.⁶⁶⁰ He also asserts that the action of Nicias terrified the Syracusans enough to elect three generals with absolute powers, which is what Thucydides 6.72-73 records, except the attribution of fear to their motives was his own.

⁶⁵⁶ Littman 1970:195.

⁶⁵⁷ Thuc. 6.64-71.

⁶⁵⁸ See Littman 1970:197.

⁶⁵⁹ *Nic.* 16.3.

⁶⁶⁰ Littman 1970:198.

The next paragraph in *Nicias* concerning the temple at Olympieium brings Plutarch's methods together. What happened at the temple is a problem. After the Syracusan retreat, Thucydides states that the Syracusans sent a garrison to the nearby Olympieium fearing the Athenians would make off with the treasure.⁶⁶¹ However, he states, 'The Athenians did not go to the temple (πρὸς μὲν τὸ ἱερὸν οὐκ ἤλθον); they gathered their dead, put them on a pyre, and camped there for the night.'⁶⁶² Contrarily, two other extant writings on this episode from Diodorus and Pausanias say that the Athenians did take the Olympieium.⁶⁶³ Both writers may have taken this information from Philistus.⁶⁶⁴ Hornblower notes that Thucydides' negative presentation of πρὸς μὲν τὸ ἱερὸν οὐκ ἤλθον may indicate a polemical point against a circulating account that the Athenians captured the place.⁶⁶⁵ In light of the disagreement in other authors, it seems that 'the facts of the matter were indeed controversial.'⁶⁶⁶ Plutarch would have been aware of the discrepancy if Philistus did indeed say the temple was captured, because he had access to Philistus, as we saw in the prologue. Even if not, Plutarch was widely read, and if there were enough claims that the temple was captured for both Diodorus and Pausanias to say so, he likely would have been aware of it.

How Plutarch handles the situation shows the application of his character theory to a historical problem. What would the cautious and pious Nicias have done? Both of these aspects of Nicias' character could argue that he would not have captured the temple, from Plutarch's point of view. With Syracusan cavalry around and a force of men in a good defensive position, an attack would have seemed risky. Further, Nicias would have been very concerned about the controversy of capturing sacred ground and the risk of his soldiers plundering something,

⁶⁶¹ Thuc. 6.70.4.

⁶⁶² Thuc. 6.70.1.

⁶⁶³ Diodorus 13.5.4 and Pausanias 10.28.6.

⁶⁶⁴ Littman 1970:199.

⁶⁶⁵ Hornblower 2008:481.

⁶⁶⁶ Hornblower 2008:482.

angering gods and inviting some punishment to occur, especially as he was already uncomfortable with the entire Sicilian enterprise. This is the man who forewent the honour of a trophy to pick up forgotten war-dead⁶⁶⁷ and desired to wait twenty-seven days after the lunar eclipse.⁶⁶⁸ The Athenian demos whom he feared would also blame him. Ideas like this about Nicias' character and the nature of the events would influence Plutarch's interpretation of the historical record. Plutarch tells the narrative this way:

[...] the Athenians set out to seize it [the Olypieum], inasmuch as it contained many offerings of gold and silver. But Nicias purposely delayed operations until it was too late, and allowed a garrison from Syracuse to enter in, because he thought that if his soldiers plundered the temple's treasures the commonwealth would get no advantage from it, and he himself would incur the blame for the sacrilege.⁶⁶⁹

Littman suggests Plutarch makes an apparent compromise between the two competing traditions,⁶⁷⁰ but we further suggest that this compromise is based upon a theory of character. Plutarch is in essence giving a nod to the non-Thucydidean tradition that there was an idea to seize the temple, yet he also preserves the concern to not commit impiety. Pausanias said that the Athenians did not disturb the offerings or the priest, and Plutarch would naturally see Nicias as one who would especially be concerned about this. However, he ultimately sides with Thucydides that it was not taken, and his theory of Nicias' character could have been a major factor in deciding this.⁶⁷¹

Plutarch's conception of the character of Nicias also influenced his interpretation of the withdrawal from Syracuse. The way Thucydides tells it, withdrawal was the most expedient course of action – winter was arriving, the base would not be the best place to fight since the Athenians had no cavalry and needed to send for some, they needed more money and could

⁶⁶⁷ *Nic.* 6.5.

⁶⁶⁸ *Nic.* 23.6.

⁶⁶⁹ *Nic.* 16.6.

⁶⁷⁰ Littman 1970:199.

⁶⁷¹ However, it might be suggested that the tendency to respect Thucydides' authority could be an influence here.

gather more allies from Sicily, and they would need food and supplies to attack Syracuse in the spring.⁶⁷² Evidently, Plutarch did not find these reasons convincing.⁶⁷³ He says that Nicias did not make use of his victory, but withdrew to Naxos. He actually seems to acknowledge Thucydides' list, but uses hindsight to show this was not effective – his spending on armament was not used, and his attempts to obtain allies with the Sicels were largely unsuccessful. This inaction encouraged the Syracusans to march to Catana and burn the old Athenian camp. Plutarch again reiterates the cautious general type through the mouths of others, that 'everyone' was criticizing Nicias for his hesitation, which is not in Thucydides and may be Plutarch's own deduction.⁶⁷⁴ Plutarch sums up the character of Nicias immediately: 'When he was once in action no one could find fault with the man, for after he had set out to do a thing he was vigorous and effective; but in venturing out to do it he was hesitating and timid.'⁶⁷⁵ Plutarch is able to show this once again in the next chapter, that when winter was over Nicias sailed back to Syracuse and prosecuted the siege vigorously.

The rest of the *Life* can be seen as a series of such back-and-forth patterns, of Nicias cautious and hesitant, moving into action brilliantly when given no other choice, then withdrawing and not following through with the fight. Chapters 16-17 represent Nicias in action, performing amazing feats in carrying out the siege and thinking quickly to avert danger when their camp was under attack in the battle that killed Lamachos. Plutarch deduces that Nicias had great hopes with his successes,⁶⁷⁶ and made him bolder, 'contrary to his nature.'⁶⁷⁷ Later, when Syracuse received aid from Sparta and Demosthenes came with reinforcements from Athens, the caution of Nicias comes out again, as Demosthenes pushes for battle and his hesitancy is

⁶⁷² Thuc. 6.71.

⁶⁷³ *Nic.* 16.7.

⁶⁷⁴ Pelling 2000:47.

⁶⁷⁵ *Nic.* 16.8.

⁶⁷⁶ Pelling 2011:135 n. 14.

⁶⁷⁷ *Nic.* 18.6.

criticized and overruled.⁶⁷⁸ The eclipse of the moon also combines Nicias' characteristic hesitancy to act in military decisions as well as his superstition. Immediately before the eclipse Nicias had been pressured to withdraw, but he refused now out of his basic fear.⁶⁷⁹ This last example of Nicias' superstition is the climax of the theme in *Nicias*. Plutarch presents these character flaws at their height, and cites anti-examples from philosophy and the statesman Dion to indicate how Nicias should have acted.⁶⁸⁰ These accounts all have their foundation in Thucydides, but Plutarch particularly highlights this theme according to his understanding of character.⁶⁸¹ The retreat and its tragic ending occupy the rest of the *Life*,⁶⁸² where Nicias vindicates himself by acting valiantly and giving himself for his men, again forced into action and performing brilliantly despite the awful circumstances.

Nevertheless, Plutarch's portrayal of his last days shows how the character traits of Nicias have caused both his success and his fall, an aspect that Pelling argues is different from Thucydides.⁶⁸³ Nicias, for Thucydides, is caught up in events much larger than himself, and this is how the causation in his narrative is framed.⁶⁸⁴ Plutarch on the other hand makes the tragedy 'more personal' to Nicias, bringing out what was latent in Thucydides to show how Nicias' decisions, flowing from his nature, brought events to unfold as they did.⁶⁸⁵ While agreeing with this analysis, however, it should also be remembered that Plutarch includes the larger picture from Thucydides as well, but through a character-focused paradigm: the demagoguery of Kleon and the irrationality of the demos. These contextual factors originating from their characters, combined with the flaws in Nicias, bring the tragic end.

⁶⁷⁸ *Nic.* 21.

⁶⁷⁹ *Nic.* 23.

⁶⁸⁰ *Nic.* 24.

⁶⁸¹ See Littman 1970:222-223.

⁶⁸² *Nic.* 26-29.

⁶⁸³ Pelling 2011:130-131.

⁶⁸⁴ Pelling 2011:131.

⁶⁸⁵ Pelling 2011:131.

We can also observe that despite the tragic elements of the story, Plutarch seems to distance himself from generic factors of tragedy. Pelling's study on the endings of *Lives* shows that he generally sought to relate a more positive ending, and *Nicias* is an example of this, ending with the idea that it was not 'all in vain,' but rather that Nicias always knew that this was how it would end, lessening the tragic effects or any surprise involved.⁶⁸⁶ Plutarch's ending line of *Nicias* also provides some meaningful interpretation of the death of Nicias, along with the irony. Nicias told the Athenians that invading Sicily would achieve a bad end, yet they absolutely did not believe the report of the defeat until it was proven to them by the event. Marinatos has argued that Thucydides portrays Nicias as a wise advisor and insightful warner about the tragic end of Athenian desires.⁶⁸⁷ Duff says that Plutarch is conveying the same idea here, that Nicias is 'cast as a kind of tragic "warner," familiar from tragedy or Herodotus: only after his death, and with difficulty, is he believed.'⁶⁸⁸ In this last line the character of Nicias and the demos come together – the unthinking people and the wise but weak Nicias. From these lessons of character, Plutarch undoubtedly hoped that the history would be informative and helpful to the lives of his audience.

Conclusions on Nicias

As Pelling has written, Nicias and his 'nervous unease' is 'a theme which Plutarch takes from Thucydides but develops in a more thoroughgoing way.'⁶⁸⁹ Yet as shown above, we can build from this to argue not only that Plutarch was developing the life and character of Nicias from Thucydides, but also that character was a way of historical interpretation, of reconstructing what happened. Plutarch uses evidence from Thucydides to construct clearly delineated

⁶⁸⁶ Pelling 2011:373.

⁶⁸⁷ Marinatos 1980:305-310.

⁶⁸⁸ Duff 2011b:250.

⁶⁸⁹ Pelling 2000:47.

characters in his narrative – the demagogue Kleon, the irrational demos, and the anxious Nicias. We have seen that Plutarch not only uses a theory of character to choose what facts to include from Thucydides, but also uses it to increase understanding of the historical situation. He attempts to solve historical problems, such as reasons for any kind of delayed action, or whether the Athenians took the temple near Syracuse, by the fact of the cautious nature of Nicias. This can rightly be called a historiographical method, even where the character theory is focused upon the psychology of Nicias. In discussing Thucydides' treatment of psychology, Westlake comments, 'historians commonly draw inferences of this kind about individuals from general indications of character, and indeed the practice is almost unavoidable when writing about the past.'⁶⁹⁰ Thucydides wrote centuries before Plutarch, and Plutarch was faced with questions Thucydides did not intend to answer. Therefore, Plutarch speculated and deduced what he could from what he did have of Thucydides and other sources.

We have already noted that some commentators suggest this is a distortion on Plutarch's part. However, seeing Plutarch's work as distortions of the historical record is problematic. The grounding provided by our study of Plutarch's presentation of historical persons drawn from Thucydides can be connected to other areas of Plutarchan studies as well. When Schettino sees Plutarch to manipulate the historical record of Crassus, the reason she gives is the how his eventual defeat at Carrhae casts a shadow over the entire *Life*.⁶⁹¹ Schettino states that Plutarch's universal, ethical interpretation of Crassus diminishes the historical value of him as an individual.⁶⁹² However, our study has revealed an ethical, universal interpretation of Thucydides regarding Nicias as well, and we have shown that such a take does not mean Plutarch is being ahistorical or not doing historiography. Greek historiography was didactic and meant to show

⁶⁹⁰ Westlake 1968:73.

⁶⁹¹ Schettino 2014:425.

⁶⁹² Schettino 2014:425.

universal principles, making individuals representative of larger conceptions. Polybius would bring out the same when discussing Philip, Hannibal, or Scipio⁶⁹³ and his idea that history has didactic value for today would only make sense if there were universal principles at work.⁶⁹⁴ *Nicias*, being the parallel of *Crassus*, also has the Sicilian disaster colouring *Nicias*' life, as the prologue makes clear.⁶⁹⁵

It is true that both Crassus and Nicias acted in history in other ways and are significant beyond their eventual defeats, but Plutarch's biographies do not deny this fact, and do include other historical trajectories, such as elucidating the consequences of Nicias giving command to Kleon or Crassus' importance as a political figure and his role in defeating the slave revolt.⁶⁹⁶ Their defeats were significant for Athenian and Roman history, were well-known, provided Plutarch with plenty of source material, and represented lessons in character and action that could be useful for Plutarch's audience. It is these 'shadows' of their last campaigns that provides the most historical meaning to each *Life* and its recipients. Kahler points out that a biography concerns 'historic personalities whose lives carry meaning for their people, or for humanity.'⁶⁹⁷ In light of how important their respective catastrophes were to the memories of both Greeks and Romans, it could not help but become a theme of both *Lives*, and make them more significant, not less, historically.

This also shows a concern that the narrative itself be historical. Pitcher observes that even in modern history, the difference between 'evidence' and 'speculation' and the 'verifiable' versus the 'plausible' is difficult to determine, and is now clarified with tense changes such as 'x

⁶⁹³ *Histories* 7.11-12, 9.22, 10.2.

⁶⁹⁴ *Histories* 12.25B.

⁶⁹⁵ *Nic.* 1.1.

⁶⁹⁶ See *Crassus* 7.7-9; 8-11.

⁶⁹⁷ Kahler 1965:23.

would have known this’ or ‘*Y will have decided that.*’⁶⁹⁸ Plutarch did not have such tense change techniques and qualifiers available to him. He would not necessarily let the reader know which words were his own speculations and which were from a source, or relate in extended detail his thinking behind every interpretive decision, nor would he be expected to. Plutarch made educated guesses based upon his ideological perspective - views of stock, natural characters or beliefs about political systems – perspectives his audience would likely have shared, or at least been aware of. Some of Plutarch's guesses do not sound as plausible to us today, but the fact remains that the work of historians today is primarily composed of arguments over the most plausible guesses about history in light of meagre and mixed evidence – the same kinds of labours that Plutarch engaged in.

⁶⁹⁸ Pitcher 2009:102 (italics his).

Conclusion

Summary

This thesis has argued that Plutarch's biographical method is historiography, tracing classical Greek historiographical and biographical theory up to the Imperial period, then constructing Plutarch's philosophy and methodology, and finally examining Plutarch's engagement with Thucydides for the *Pericles* and *Nicias*. In tracing the development of the genre of biography, we saw that it has multiple influences, descending from philosophy, historiography, encomium, and poetry. We saw that ancient genre was flexible, and in comparing history and biography, there was a great deal of overlap. The methods and purposes of historians and biographers coincide in moral vision, the need to sort through sources and documents carefully, and an interest in the great deeds or words of significant individuals. The most necessary difference, according to practice and apparent reader expectations was scope: biographies were shorter than histories and each focused upon the life of a one person at time. These conclusions did not prove in themselves that the Greek *bioi* used historiographical method, but that it is possible to consider it this way, opening the way for discussing Plutarch.

In the next chapter, we examined Plutarch's intellectual background and what influences would affect his interpretation of history. We saw that Plutarch's separation of history and biography in *Alexander* is not a separation in method, but in scope. Additionally, the *Lives* were considered to be in a very real sense history, the generic demarcation notwithstanding. Plutarch's idea of history was that must be informative, true to fact, and bring out the character of the participants.

The next two chapters examined Plutarch's reading of Thucydides in the *Pericles* and *Nicias*, to demonstrate that this methodology is historiography. His repetition and preservation of the *History* in his quotations and summaries support this, and as Marincola has explained, the

historian has an obligation to be faithful to the written records, to the traditions that have been given.⁶⁹⁹ On the other hand, there is a need to be unique from one's predecessors, which is what Plutarch did in rewording, paraphrasing, and deducing from Thucydides.⁷⁰⁰ Plutarch's additions, subtractions, and other divergences from Thucydides, if not due to other sources, can be explained by Plutarch's historical reasoning. He kept to the representation of Pericles that Thucydides provided, but synthesized conflicting sources into a character progression in Pericles' political habit to arrive there. We have focused particularly on problematic areas, speculating on the logic Plutarch would have constructed in examining his sources. Further, his ideologies – his concept of characterization, Platonist political philosophy, ethical views of history, veneration for the classical tradition, and critical method of questioning were part of his overall paradigm that is useful for explaining what happened in the past.

Just as in *Pericles*, Plutarch follows closely the text of Thucydides for *Nicias*, yet reorganizes and summarizes according to the demands of a biography. Additionally, we found that Plutarch's conception of character could be used in the *Nicias* to make deductions about the historical record, to say what happened and what caused it. Even though the scope of Plutarch's *bioi* is centred around individuals and their character, his methods of characterisation are types of historiography.

Thus, we have seen ways in which Plutarch's additions and differences from Thucydides need not be seen as fictional elaboration, or literary embellishment, but as serious historical reasoning. This is not to say that Plutarch was correct in his guesswork, or did not commit errors, but it does attempt to show that apparent problems in his methodology can be demonstrated as consistent with his overall historiographical care. His errors and ancient perspective

⁶⁹⁹ Marincola 1997:106.

⁷⁰⁰ Marincola 1997:13-15.

notwithstanding, we can agree with Pelling that Plutarch did try to get it right, and in our effort to demonstrate Plutarch's consistency on the issue, we suggest he wanted to get it right every time.

For future research

Further research on Plutarch could be aided by seeing his methods as historiographical. It could further our understanding of his philosophy, his Greekness under Roman rule, and the relationship between the *Moralia* and *Lives*. Looking at Plutarch's attempts to reconstruct the past might also be compared to the idea of 'history as re-enactment.' Looking for historiographical method in Imperial period biographies is also a promising direction. Suetonius writing in Latin near Plutarch's time, as well as Non-Greeks writing in biographies in Greek, such as Philo's *Life of Moses* and the synoptic gospels would make fruitful areas of study, as would comparisons to each other and to Plutarch's *Lives*.

Philo was a Platonist living under Roman dominion reaching back to more glorious days of the past to write a biography of Moses, an ancient hero of his people. Philo used the Hebrew Bible as a source for this work, which enables us to compare his source text with the final product and observe whether his methodology bears similarity to Greek historiography. McGing has already begun work in this area,⁷⁰¹ but there is more work to be done, and a comparison with Plutarch's methodology would also be interesting, as a fellow Platonist yet also from a separate religious tradition.

Likewise, the synoptic gospels would provide an opportunity to examine the innovations of Greek biography. In most of the 20th century the gospels were considered as *sui generis* literature,⁷⁰² though now they are more commonly grouped under biography after the studies of

⁷⁰¹ McGing 2006.

⁷⁰² See Aune 1981:9-60.

Burridge, first published in 1992.⁷⁰³ The understanding of the gospels as biographies has been profitable for new directions in gospel studies, and has created interdisciplinary dialogue between New Testament and Classical scholarship.⁷⁰⁴ Connecting biographical method and historiographical method could also open up new opportunities in this area.

⁷⁰³ Though Votaw 1915:45-73 and 217-49; and Stanton 1974 also made contributions. Burridge's book is now republished and revised as Burridge 2004.

⁷⁰⁴ Burridge 2004:252-288.

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